

THE WIRE

adventures in modern music

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Techno theories
Mille Plateaux,
Alec Empire, Oval

Who needs record companies?
*An anarchist's guide to starting
your own label*

Courtney Pine's
jukebox

Mark Stewart

Harrison
Birtwistle

New Kingdom

Yoko Ono

A life in flux

ELECTRONICA • OUT ROCK • DRUM 'N' BASS • NEW JAZZ & CLASSICAL • GLOBAL



PHOTO: THOMAS LANE

Jazz additions on BBC Radio 3

An abstract painting featuring a trumpet and a saxophone. The trumpet is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, while the saxophone is depicted in cool, blue and teal hues. The background is a complex, layered composition of these colors with expressive, brush-like textures.

From Monday, 1 April you can hear more jazz on Radio 3,
as *Jazz Notes* moves to the network from Radio 2.

The full line-up of jazz on Radio 3 now looks like this:

Jazz Notes: Mondays–Thursdays, 12.30am

Jazz Record Requests: Saturdays at 5.00pm

Jazz Concert / Impressions: Saturdays, alternating fortnights at 10.30pm

Jazz Documentary: Mondays at 4.30pm



BBC RADIO 3
90-92 FM

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your monthly exploration of new music

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The May Issue of The Wire
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letters

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or fax 0171 287 4767, or e-mail the.wire@ukonline.co.uk
Every letter published wins a FREE CD

Question time

I've a few remarks to make, some will accuse me of nit-picking, but here goes
a) How come only a bare minimum of your monthly Soundcheck winners actually made it to your Top 50 albums of the year?

b) How come some of the musicians you feature (DJ Spooky, Marc Almond) never have their record reviewed?

c) How come many of the albums listed on the Office Ambience chart are never reviewed?

d) How come no one has ever mentioned the free Mute Records compilation CD in higher letter? Did everybody unanimously find it so horrendous or fantastic that they felt nothing needed to be said about it? Is there a conspiracy of silence out there?

e) How come you did away with the monthly Wire Winners section? Or have those frames replaced them? And was it a coincidence that there seemed to be no one album that stood out from the rest of the albums selected in February?

f) How come in your Invisible Jukebox section you always play the musician in question records which he/she will in all probability successfully identify, know about and have in his/her collection? Why not test them on the sort of music they have no a priori affines with instead of always painstakingly choosing the kind they cannot help but know about? I enjoyed it when Gavin Bryars mistook an underwater recording of bearded seals for "old rudimentary electronic music"

g) Thank you very much for the Evan Parker interview (The Wire 144). I hadn't read such sensible and intelligent thoughts on music since John Cage
Caroline Mossave Cambridge

Reading Elton Rogers's accusations about the misuse of the term 'Krautrock' in connection with Tortoise, I checked the review of *Millions Now Living* (The Wire 143) and couldn't find any direct comparison to his beloved Germans. Perhaps he was confusing *The Wire* with other magazines, where Krautrock has indeed become a trendy buzzword, used by people no doubt more familiar with Stereolab than the 'real thing'.

I did, however, find plenty about the influence of dub, HiP-Hop, Ambient, Techno and drum 'n' bass on their music. Perhaps Elton didn't read that far — while his dyspeptic rant was amusing, he seemed to completely miss the point of the band, and though there were moments when the 'Virgin 1976' comparison was horribly accurate, it certainly wasn't the nine-tenths claim!

What about the Augustus Pablo-style melodica? Or does that not fit in with a musical world-view that seems to hold *The Faust Tapes* as an avant garde equivalent to Pet Sounds?

Along with previous whinger, Sven Løgg, I find a disturbing cocktail of cynicism and superiority in their attitudes. Without offering anything in the way of modern musical alternatives, they take the intellectual high ground and a 'damned if they do/damned if they don't' attitude towards those who dare take on board 'Krautrock' influences, without any seeming appreciation as to how they can be re-applied in different contexts. I find this purism and obsession with historical roots little different — better record collectors aside — from those people who smugly demonstrate their knowledge of 60s rock to put down modern guitar pop groups, the continued assertion that it's been done better and done before.

It may indeed be the case, but I suspect that if your correspondents

were as genuinely removed from the milieu in which Tortoise and Stereolab work as they imply, they wouldn't have bothered to lift their pens.

On the other hand, if they understand Krautrock so well, why don't they pick up their guitar/synthesiser/synth/stape editors instead? There's obviously easy pickings to be made among those of us who are easily fooled.

Julian Lawton Cardiff

The searcher

As I'm fairly new to the type of music covered in your magazine, I wonder if you could help me in trying to find where the records of the year you listed are available? As a recent defector from the mainstream pop world, the main record shops that I frequent are places like HMV and Virgin, but while I was in there the other day, I hardly found any of the CDs you listed in your records of the year, never mind trying to find them on cassette. Could you please give an idea of whereabouts I might find many of the records listed? Are there record shops in London where I might find them?

Roy Jeff Oxford

One of the problems with many of the records we discuss is that they don't fit comfortably into marketing categories. This, coupled with the general ignorance of rockers (especially in high street stores), leads to things getting lost in 'dead' shelves in our local Oxford Street megastores, we've found Japanese *Progrhythmedia* in the World Music section, Jon Hassell's recent HiP-Hop album *Dressing For Pleasure* under New Age, and our own release of David Toop's *Screen Ceremonies in Jazz (ouch)*. Clearly it can be difficult — in London, it's best to try specialist shops such as Rough Trade, These Select-A-Disc, or alternatively pester your local megastore until they wake up — Ed

MARK STEWART



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soundings

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts



Harrison Birtwistle

Festivals/Seasons

Secret Theatres Harrison Birtwistle retrospective season at London's South Bank (12 April–4 May) focusing on the theatrical and dramatic aspects of the composer's work to date. The season opens with a semi-staged version of his opera *The Mask Of Ophelia* with The London Sinfonietta (RFH, 12 April). Further highlights include chamber works played by The Endymion Ensemble (RFH, 19), pianist Joanna McGragor with London Sinfonietta performing *Slow Freeze* (RFH, 26), the world premiere of a new song cycle, *Pulse Shadows* (QEH, 29), tube concerto *The Cry Of Anus* (1 May, RFH), and the piano concert *Antiphones*, also played by McGragor with The Philharmonia Orchestra/Peter Eotvos (RFH, 2). Various extra-concert activities accompany the season, including works by Birtwistle's students masterclasses by The Arden Quartet, and a dance project involving The Richard Alton Dance Company. BBC Radio 3 will be recording most events for broadcast. For full details and ticket information, phone the South Bank Box Office on 0171 960 4242.

Betty Freeman This Los Angeles photographer has captured many 20th century musical innovators on film, producing intimate portraits and insights into the lives of such artists as Canon Nanarrow, Morton Feldman, Harry Partch, Terry Riley, György Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis and many more. An extensive collection of her photographs will be on display this month, from 12 April, on Level 5 of London's Royal Festival Hall. The exhibition is free, and is open until 10pm every day.

Tribal Gathering Advance warning about this outdoor 21-hour Techno extravaganza, attended by 25,000 last year. Among countless artists performing and DJing will be Underworld, Black Grape, Leftfield, Bandulu, Golke & Metalheadz, Doc Scott, Kenmistry & Storm, Conemelt, Andrew Weatherall, Richie Hawtin, Nightmares On Wax, Loinrock, James Lavelle, LUT Bukem, Coldcut, DJ Food, and more. As last year, the Gathering is happening at Otmoor Park, Beckley, Oxfordshire, 4 May, \$29 + booking fee, credit card hotline 0171 344 0044. For information, phone 0181 963 0940.

On Stage

Amon Düül II Rare appearance by the original Krautrock chaos collective London Astoria, 19 April, \$10, 0171 434 0403.

Gescom + isophie & franni Live set from Autrech's Rob and Sean, supported by zzz... you know who, and Total. Newcastle Live Theatre, 23 April, \$6 0191 232 1232.

Bruce Gilbert Traffic-stopping performance/installation by the Beekeeper. London Highbury Corner Roundabout, 18 April, 8.30am, free.

Herbie Hancock Hard driving bop with the New Standard quartet. London Clapham Grand, 18 April, \$15, 0181 963 0940.

Labradford US drone rockers on the road with The High Llamas. Nottingham Sam Fays 19 April, Newcastle Riverside (10), Glasgow Cathouse (12), Dundee Lucifer's Mill (13), Aberdeen Lemon Tree (14), Colchester Arts Centre (17), Leicester Princess Charlotte (18), London ULU (19), Birmingham Jug Of Ale (21), Sheffield University (22), Manchester University (23), London Garage (24), Stoke Wheatheaf (25), Wolverhampton Varsity (26), Treforest Glamorgan University (28), Southampton Jones (29), Norwich UEA (30).

Language Showcase Circadian Rhythms, Buckfunk 3000, Tao, BioMuse and Elter from Tony Thorpe's experimental Electronica label. London Rhythmic, 12 April, 0171 713 5859.

Morphogenesis Bio-activity Improv. London Red Rose Theatre, 21 April, 8pm, \$5/\$3.50, 0171 263 7265.

Musa K World fusion from the eight-piece Otherside. London QEH, 11 April, 7.45pm, \$12.50, 0171 960 4242.

Eddie Palmieri Son king of Nu

Yoncan psychedelic jazz. London Jazz Cafe, 2-3 April, \$15/\$12.50, 0171 916 6000.

Pram + Heavenly Post-rock fundraiser for Pro-Choice Campaign. London Garage, 20 April, 8pm, \$5, 0171 344 0044.

Lou Reed Setting the twilight reeling with his current trio. London Shepherd's Bush Empire (5 April), then Manchester Labett's Apollo (6 May), London Wembley Arena (8), Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (10), Birmingham Academy (11).

Max Roach + Archie Shepp Didactic all-dayer comprising workshops, lectures and concert by legendary drummer and saxophonist. London QEH, 13 April, 10.30am–10.30pm, \$15 (all day/\$12 concert), 0171 960 4242.

Shankar Ex-Shakti violin virtuoso in rare UK appearance with his new multiracial group. London QEH, 24 April, 7.45pm, \$15–\$10, 0171 960 4242.

Sinfonye Steve Wishart's 'Late Early Music' quartet present *Symphonia* interpretations of the visionary music of mystic Hildegard Of Bingen. London QEH, 18 April, 8pm, \$12/\$10, 0171 960 4242.

Sonic Youth The NYC group's *Washing Machine* tour comes to town (finally!) Manchester Academy (13 April), Glasgow Barrowlands (14), London Jazz Cafe (see Tonal Fresh below, 16), London Forum (17–19). Tickets \$10 (Manchester \$9.50).

Tonal Trash Special Sonic Youth Improv night featuring Thurston Moore, Lee Ranaldo, Ascension and Lur Cæcil, sponsored by The Wire. London Jazz Cafe, 16 April, \$10/\$8 adv, 0171 916 6000.

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global ear

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month . . .

New York

In the wired-up, plugged-in, pulsating metropolis of Manhattan, electronic music is only just beginning to catch on. The suburbanite boroughs of Brooklyn and the Bronx boast healthy reggae and HipHop scenes, but in Manhattan itself, it's weren't for the gay populace (a huge dance music market) and the influential (but now defunct) Sound Factory, chances are that House and Garage megacubicles like the Palladium and Tunnel wouldn't exist.

But for the Manhattanite looking for more than four to the floor, there are slim pickings. You can either stay home or trawl through a labyrinth of tiny East Village drinking spots. Here, on any given night, you'll find a DJ with a pair of decks stuffed in a corner of a bar-turned-club for the evening. (Dancing, because of a bizarre distinction in the New York licensing code, is usually prohibited.) Such dives, along with the odd club night, one-off event and loft party, are where the noaves congregate for electronic listening.

In this climate, it was both wonderful and strange that OffBeat — part Electronics "happening", part AIDS benefit, part history lesson — generated so much press attention. Organized by the Red Hot Organization, Whitney Museum of American Art and TVT/WasTraf Records, the event paralleled the Beat Generation's out 'n' mix aesthetic and Electronic's sampled-dubs. DJs, performance art and visuals, live sets by Soul Coughing and the Canadian group Spooky Ruben (neither of which added up to much), cinema vérite, and a live radio broadcast were all crammed into the 600-capacity Westbeth Theater on a Friday night in early February. A Beat exhibit at the Whitney had preceded the event, a one-hour television show on the Beat legacy was due to follow it. The music staff of *Spin*, The Village Voice and the *New York Times* all blagged tickets to the event; a CNN crew was forced to freeze on the street with the plebs until a publicist confirmed that they could be allowed in, and journalists and cameramen roamed the rooms, documenting every moment for posterity. Kerouac and his crew must have been laughing from beyond the grave at the media spectacle OffBeat caused.

Did the reality justify the hype? Mostly. The Beats' forte was their ability to generate a scene, and OffBeat undoubtedly was one. The event's mix of retro and rave



DJ Spooky

was successful, although some of the accoutrements — the Brakeage and Warhol colour-blob films, the paper effigies mounted on remote control Tonka trucks made you wonder who had the hallucinogens, and whether they'd share some with you.

Credit the DJs — Mat Ducease (from Skyleb), Krush and DJ Spooky — for making the event work. Ducease's set was pure Dada: he refused to mix songs or even play them all the way through. "I'm a sound junkie," he explained to me later, and like all junkies, he was going for the quick hit. His stream-of-consciousness playlist jumped between drum and guitar crescendos, star music and Jimi Hendrix extracts. The club kids were jaded by the juxtapositions, but Ducease got his fix. It was obvious just minutes into his set, he was transformed from agitated DJ, staring at the turntables with studious desperation, to beatific listener, smiling, eyes closed, rocking back and forth to the rhythm.

A contrast to Ducease's private ceremony was provided by Krush's crowd-pleasing grooves. Dressed in a baseball hat and sweatshirt, the Japanese DJ looked more American than most of the punters, and his sub-bass jeep beats shared more with East Coast Hip-Hop than with any of the diverse musics of his homeland. With deft flicks of his musical wrist (to paraphrase U-Roy), he sliced up the layers of rhythm with Old School scratching.

Recontextualization was also the theme for Amin Baraka and DJ Spooky. Technologically updating coffeehouse poetry recitals, Baraka — ne LeRoi Jones — performed his 30 year old poem "Black Dada Nihilismus" over Spooky's ominous jazz soundscapes. Acoustic basslines shadowed Baraka's mighty text — a call for black empowerment that invokes the alchemical transmutations of Hermes Trismegistus — with the music building and fading, but keeping enough distance to let Baraka's rich tones roam magnificently.

With such collaborations, OffBeat formed a bridge from the old Beat to the new. Shame, though, that the organizers also emulated the Beats' boys' club mentality: although half of the event's attendees were women, only one female performer made the bill (Spooky Ruben's keyboard player). It was curious also that although OffBeat was an AIDS benefit, there was no mention of nor information about the disease during the evening. An oversight to amend, especially since the OffBeat CD is dedicated to Jim Nash, founder of the Waxtail label, who died of AIDS last October. **JULIE TARASKA** OffBeat: A Red Hot Sound Trip is available on TVT/WasTraf (Tel. 001 212 979 6410). The Beat Experience CD-ROM is available from Voyager (Web: <http://www.voyagerco.com/>).

bites



New Kingdom

You know you're in for an interesting interview when your subjects begin by comparing their music to a convoy of Mack trucks. "The convoy's getting bigger and bigger until it's unstoppable, picking up everybody along the way who wants to be down," says Sebastian Laws of New York rappers New Kingdom. Similarly, his partner Jason Furlow's conversation is at times as "mad abstract" as his own lyrics. "Animal was my favorite drummer," he says, slouching on the couch of a London hotel room, later becoming as wide-eyed and animated as the stock-crazed Muppet.

The duo's new album, *Paradise Don't Come Cheap*, was recorded over a period of 12 months at their studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Basic tracks were laid down and then added to over time, resulting in a series of dense collages. The effect, says Sebastian, is comparable to such studio concealment techniques as back-masking in that "a lot of stuff on the record is coming at ya kinda subliminal. You hear it but you don't really hear it. There's a lot of whispering and shit that you've got to really use headphones [to hear]. We have a very wide range of music that we listen to. You shouldn't be just rock or HipHop or jazz or classical, it should be all types of music and whatever's fresh

Making one music, that will be universal music."

NK's relentless, infectious low-slung R&B is informed by their approach to sampling. Loops and samples aren't handled with kid gloves: they run backwards, forwards, are accelerated and slowed down, whatever it takes to get the right sound. Jason explains, "When you look for a sample, you pick the needle up and you're looking for the most dramatic part of the song. Usually we have all the dramatic pieces of, like, ten songs on one song. That's the best thing about sampling: you don't have to wait. Everybody our age, we got such short attention spans. I like the drama-rama. I mean, the whole record is drama, it's not for the weak-hearted at all."

The ragged edges of NK records (their debut album, *Heavy Load*, was released in 1994) conceal a more careful, intuitive process of selecting samples. "Sometimes it's the feeling you get off the sound of the guitar that makes it fly," says Jason. "It's not actually what-so-and-so was playing or the piano riff so-and-so was doing. It's just that feeling. If you can keep that drama in it, and then have to pay for it, and recycle it instead of rapping it, then you're in the house."

Live, New Kingdom are a very different beast. The music alone is heavily intoxicating, but married to the duo's utterly unhinged raps, copious amounts of stage smoke, and Jason's Southern-pracher-at-the-crossroads routines, it becomes a full-blown altered state.

"The whole thing about HipHop is that you've got to keep it live," says Sebastian. "That's where it comes from: the DJ scratching in a corner in Kingsbridge. That's what we try to bring back. A lot of times you see shows that are a bit lackluster, just a guy on a stage with a mic. The band is the whole New Kingdom thing, encompassing all types of artistic things together."

Recently they've started rolling with a full live group, including co-producer/engineer Scott Harding on lap-steel and psychedelic guitar, and Tam, a Japanese youth playing "space-drum" style. Then there's their mysterious long-time DJ, Starchild. "He's a basement muthafucka!" exclaims Jason. "He lives at home in Long Island in a basement with his moms, but when he's with New Kingdom it's like being a superhero."

The analogy of MCs and DJs as larger than life comic-book heroes is an important part of HipHop's mythology, and can be traced back through Afrika Bambaataa And The Soul Sonic Force's portrayal of themselves as the "Renegades Of Funk," and to George Clinton's band of funky aliens, derived from the comic-book album cover art of Pedro Bell. Jason, and his doppelganger MC persona Noss, exist in the same fantastic reality.

Sebastian picks up on the superhero theme. "Yeah, it's like the Justice League. You know Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman all do their own thing separately but when it's time, it's like we're in the Justice League now." **CHRIS CAPPHORN** *Paradise Don't Come Cheap* will be released in May on *Grey Street/Island*. A single, "Mecca Or Bust," is out now on the same label.

Stevie Wishart

"When we were playing in Holland a few years ago, a reviewer commented that he liked our music because it sounded like it was composed yesterday, even though it was medieval music," says Stevie Wishart of her group Sinfonye. "I think that's really important — that music shouldn't sound old — because that's not what it would have sounded like in those days. So I think we've got to repeat that freshness and that's where I think that improvisation comes in, because that's our link in keeping it very much alive."

The link between contemporary improvisation and medieval music isn't immediately obvious, but Stevie Wishart first noted a common ground via her studies of composition at York University and in an improvisational workshop with John Cage, Merce Cunningham and David Tudor in Edinburgh in the early 80s.

"The medieval era was very experimental," she explains. "Nothing was standardised: pitch wasn't standardised, notation wasn't fixed, instruments and language weren't standardised. It was still very much a time when people were doing their own things in their own worlds."

Wishart's musical projects are diverse but centre around Sinfonye's take on Early Music. She says it will become "less of a straight medieval group," with the

Patrick Pulsinger

Over the phone from Austria, Patrick Pulsinger is telling me why he loves cocktail lounge music: "If you listen to a really good Herb Alpert record, it's cheesy but it's great at the same time. He's not only writing one line, but making ten variations out of it. We call it 'schmerz' here in Vienna: it's a kind of joke, but not really like it's supposed to be funny, just strange that people did it that way."

Pulsinger may have appropriated Jan Fleming-style lounge-lizard camp imagery for the artwork of last year's *Porno CD*, but those comparisons stop at the music. If you're lucky enough to have picked up any of the releases on Pulsinger's Cheap label (all limited to issues of 500), you'll be aware that surprise is his watchword. The label, and its subsidiaries Morbid and Showroom Recordings, is the product of his long-time friendship and musical partnership with Erdum Tuniskan, the duo pump out their own music — a convoy of screwy, clipped takes on Techno, Electro, trippy beats and jazz — under a variety of different aliases including *io* and, most recently, *The Private Lightning Six*.

The pair met years of slugging it out in the musical hinterlands. Pulsinger drumming in a ska group, Tuniskan in the colourless world of early 80s synth and Industrial music. They couldn't look more different — Pulsinger a bespectacled James LaVette, Tuniskan a short, husky, scruffy bloke — but on record or during one of their live shows (which feature their large entourage of musicians playing freestyle saxophone, trumpets, drum machines, and unwieldy piles of collectable analogue synthesizers),

repertoire expanding to include more of her own compositions.

Working alongside two other female singer-musicians and percussionist Jim Denley, the two main instruments that Wishart plays in Sinfonye are medieval fiddle and hurdy gurdy. She treats the latter with electronic processing "to enrich the drones and overtones." Early Music purists (and there are lots of them) may blanch at such a prospect, but as with the recent hurdy gurdy experiments of Japanese guitarist Kaji Hano, Wishart is expanding the traditions by which the instrument was first formalised.

"If you look at instruments like the hurdy gurdy, that's an instrument that's always been experimented with in medieval times it was very much considered an experimental instrument and was going through very many different forms. In a way now I'm also inventing new techniques, electronic manipulation and things."

One of Wishart's projects outside Sinfonye is the Australian electroacoustic group Machines For Making Sense. Unfortunately, the group's performance at the LMU's New Auras season last year was excruciating, thanks to the insane chattering and entraining vocal mannerisms of its two 'sound poets'.

"The most complex sounds are speech," says Wishart, by way of defence, "so instead of singers we have two sound poets. And lots of our instrumental sounds are inspired by or derived from working with those

language sounds. It relates quite strongly with my early work with troubadour music where you have to understand the text really well to improvise with it."

By way of further diversity, she's recently been recording with violinist Jon Rose and the 'nose'-based experimental quartet Red Spiders featuring drummer Tony Buck, also a member of Otomo Yoshihide's Peril, "with me mainly playing distorted hurdy gurdy and screaming".

Following a recent installation project with artist Joan Grounds in Sydney, a Sinfonye CD-ROM is planned for release on Spanish label Glossa. Wishart is also co-ordinating a multimedia project with Sinfonye to contextualise the work of 12th-century nun, composer, artist, visionary and proto-Renaissance Woman, Hildegard Of Bingen.

"The arts were more related then, and this is a case in point: she wasn't just a composer, she was very much a polymath. We're creating our own performance context to show other aspects of her work. It's interesting to hear Gregorian chants and how they relate to her visions, which are incredible paintings, very abstract. We're going to have four projects to show a vision: each to go with the music." **PIKE BARNES**
Symphony Of The Harmony Of Celestial Revelations Part One is available on Celestial Harmonies (through Select). Sinfonye play in London this month: see Soundings for details.



PHOTO: BOB YOUNG

they perform with telepathic understanding.

"We never play a gig twice," says Tunkian. "Each one is new, we can't recreate an old track 99 per cent of all our tracks are live: we just pushed the start button and looked what happened. We are jamming." Apart from the quantized funk of "Claire" (released last year on Mo' Wax), Pulsinger also embraces this improvisational looseness. "It's the same kind of feeling that must have been around when jazz was pretty new," he says, "total strangers get together, bring a piece of equipment and jam. The same thing is happening right now. We've been playing together for five years, so in this time we've learnt that everything can happen, and the other

guys don't freak out because something unexpected happens. We don't do a lot of stuff in the computer, most of the time we just push the button on the mixing board; that way, if you feel, 'Now that thing must go out, you just push it and it's out. It should have a human feel to it'."

It's perhaps the 'analogue-human' approach that's drawn Pulsinger and his crew back to early 80s BDs. Electro music created on the futuristic instruments of the time, but taped in studios still geared to acoustic recordings. What exactly is the attraction of those cybotronic constructions for musicians like Pulsinger? "When Old School stuff came out, the synthesizer technique was

not so advanced, so a lot of the stuff sounds like it's not really in sync, or the recording and mixing techniques were not so good, so it just has a different buzz to it. If you listen to old Electro stuff, I totally do not know what's going on on those records! That's because they used tape loops back then, and it gives a really strange feeling." He also harbours sneaking admiration for a forgotten Electro-virtuosity. "If you listen to some production from the time when the 808 was new, these people really worked on this piece, I mean they did breaks and combinations and variations, it's impossible, nobody does it today. The other day Erdum put on an old Simple Minds record with heavy 808 programming that takes days. The guy who programmed that had sat down and was maybe going further into the machine than any of the Techno producers. So we always try to use a little bit of that spirit."

With that in mind, is there any way to summarise the philosophy of Cheap? "Our label is open for everything," says Pulsinger. "There are a lot of different tastes on the label. And we want to keep it like that, because it's a really cool thing not knowing what we'll put out this summer: maybe a rock or jazz record. Sometimes we do a track on the weekend, we go mastering it on Tuesday, and then have the record on Friday and we can spin it on the weekend after that. It's going really fast, we do it 24 hours a day. So I think this is a sign of the times that you can make radical records again. Maybe they only sell 500 copies, but these 500 people made a good choice!" **BOB YOUNG** Private Lightning Six's "They Came Down!" EP is out now on Horbot. Cheap Records are distributed by Plastic Head.

HIM

"I'm really tired of downer music," says Doug Scharrn, nominal leader of the new US dub rock collective HIM. As ex-drummer with those (now defunct) quintessential Magadon rockers Codomo, he should know. "That she ran around, went as far as it could possibly go. I was pretty unhappy with it by the end." Scharrn also drums with Rex and June Of 44, but the reason for calling him up now is the excellent album he's just delivered under the name HIM. Egg is both a tribute to the four-track halls of mirrors created by Lee Perry and early dub producers, and further evidence of a sea-change in US rock (see also Tortoise, U2, Drien, Rome, et al).

Prime mover in the project turns out to be Sez Fernandez, musician, DJ, journalist, founder of the Brooklyn-based dub label Wondsound, and author of the 1994 Hip-Hop tract *The New Beats*. Scharrn appeared on Fernandez's 1995 Crooklyn Dub Consortium *Certified Dope Vol. 1* compilation, and with bassist Phil Spinto was later asked to perform live at the writer's Night Of The Living Dub night at NYC's Cooler



"He asked us to be a rhythm section for one of these nights," Scharrn recalls. "All of a sudden, the day we were supposed to do this, all these other people showed up: a DJ, a trumpet player... And vocal/performance artist Christian Dauterive. He's kind of a wack character. When I first met him he was doing crazy performances where he made something that was supposed to resemble a womb, and he came out of it bloody and naked. At that first HIM show, he had this latex thing on, doing this crazy vocal stuff."

Fernandez also put Scharrn back in touch with Bill Laswell (an early Laswell group used to rehearse in

Doug's Mom's basement), with whom he shares a deep interest in the holistic trance rhythms of Morocco and Persia — witness the sounds of djembe, babouk, dumbek, wood flute, clay pots and bhang drum that pepper Egg. "Those musics have spiritual purposes and act as offerings to their community," he says. "Mostly the Gnoua stuff is there to cleanse places of bad spirits and heal people, and with the Joujouka people, the droning notes are supposed to heal the mind. There's ancient, almost medicinal purposes to the music, you know?" **ROB YOUNG** Egg is out now on Southern Records (through SRO)

Tony Levin

Put hotel rooms and rock tours together and historically the equation yields tales of Viegotic destruction and debauchery. Tony Levin has put these venues to far more constructive use. The King Crimson bass/guitar and Stick player — and session man to John Lennon and Buddy Rich, Peter Gabriel and Laurie Anderson, among many others — recorded a sizeable chunk of his first solo album, *World Diary*, in them. The only disturbance to his fellow guests were "strange sounds" emanating from his room — violinist Shanker singing and screaming, for instance.

Live shows take up the greater part of Levin's year, so solo projects have always ended up being shelved. However, for *World Diary* a friend suggested that Levin take an ADAT recorder on tour, recording whenever he met up with. "Before he'd even finished that sentence I knew that I would do it," says Levin. "Some of it was recorded in people's houses, some of it was in studios. I wanted to do whatever I could do to work with a certain person while I was around him."

World Diary is a brilliantly realized series of eclectic vignettes, with Levin's bass/guitar and Chapman Stick (a 12-stringed instrument with guitar and bass strings that requires a percussive hammer-on technique) combining in duo or trio format with a diverse array of musicians. There were few overdubs — improvisation and spontaneity were the key factors.

Levin's Minusien plays doudouk, which is an Armenian double-reed instrument," explains Levin. "He doesn't even speak English, we can't even speak together. I got him to come to the room [in Paris]. He understood we were going to play. He came in and started playing into the mic. I hadn't turned on the tape player let alone got a level. I turned it on a little way into

it. I messed some stuff and then there was the fact of what am I going to play? So yes, very spontaneous."

There are also some spectacular free-blowing sessions with Canadian percussion group Nexus. "Musically, I like the idea of just throwing something at these guys. First get the night guys, the right musicians. These guys never play with electronic instruments, they mostly play classical things, but they're wild in their own way. They're capable of anything. And when I was mixing it I couldn't even figure out some of the stuff, what instrument it was that they played."

At the start of the interview, Levin described the self-recorded, self-financed *World Diary* — he designed the artwork too — as "an exercise in self-indulgence." I later put it to him that a musician with his pedigree could have been self-indulgent in an overblown, bombastic way. It happened before. "Did I say that?" he asks, laughing. "That's an interesting phrase I used — I'll stand by that. But having done a self-indulgent album it can be good or not good. That doesn't mean it was an arrogant record."

As well as playing the Stick, Levin has devised a technique which he refers to as "funk fingers." "I play the bass with this technique that I developed which is two trimmed down drumsticks attached to my fingers. I think I'm the only one who plays that way. It's about as percussive as you can get. Sometimes after a Peter Gabriel concert, someone will come up and I'll see them staring at my fingers and they'll say, 'I thought you had much longer fingers'."

"With King Crimson, I'm playing the upright bass with the bow more and more. I put the fuzzone on it and go wild — which is totally inappropriate for rock, but there's no one to tell me that." **MIKE BARNES** *World Diary* is out now on Discipline Global Mobile, PO Box 1533, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5ER. A new King Crimson album of studio impressions is due to be released in May.



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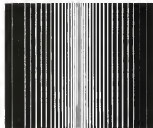
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Is **Harrison Birtwistle**, the composer who caused panic at the Proms, really the bad boy of modern classical music? Or just someone who refuses to bow down before the UK's crumbling musical establishment? Nick Kimberley finds out

Month in, month out, the pages of *The Wire* remind us that, when it comes to music, we live in a poly stylistic age in which poly stylism itself is just the possibility among many. For us listeners, that's fine; we can choose which routes we take to the world. Composers, on the other hand, cannot simply dip in and out, taking what they want here, picking up what takes their fancy there. They must make a choice.

Or perhaps it isn't even a choice. Harrison Birtwistle, for one, maintains that his music isn't written in a style merely selected from the catalogue. "I do what I do as clearly as I can. I haven't got a choice. I can't be responsible for the music once it's written, or for how you perceive it. To me it always seems that I'm starting from the same place. Something in a sense changes, so that the thing itself changes, it goes through different phases, shows different aspects, but the central idea remains. It all seems to be part of one idea."

That idea, Birtwistle suggests, is "a musical thing" rather than something which can be expressed verbally, but that only emphasises the fundamental coherence of a compositional career spanning nearly 40 years (Birtwistle was born in 1934). This month, London audiences can get a sense of that coherence during the South Bank Centre's Birtwistle retrospective, eight concerts assembled under the heading 'Secret Theatres'. 'Secret Theatre' is the title of a Birtwistle composition from 1984 and it provides an appropriate rubric for the season. 'Right from the beginning I've never thought of a musical idea which didn't have ramifications in the theatre. That was one facet of the way it could be expressed, and that's always seemed a very natural thing for me.'

The Secret Theatres retrospective opens with a 'semi-staged' ("whatever that is," grunts Birtwistle) performance of his opera *The Mask Of Orpheus*, not seen in the UK since its first performances by English National Opera in 1986. It is a massive work, three and a half hours long, and its composition occupied Birtwistle for more than a decade. The critic Wilfrid Mellers has suggested that 'opera, after *The Mask Of Orpheus*, will never be the same', which is also to suggest that we in the audience cannot be the same either. Whether operatic or orchestral, his music involves us in an act of listening as visceral as it is intellectual. Onlookers in Birtwistle's secret theatre, we bear witness to a ritual that began before we entered and will continue after the role has faded away. Conventional notions of beginning and ending are in abeyance.

I ask Birtwistle how he knows when a piece he is writing has, in fact, reached an end. As so often, his reply doesn't provide an exact answer, but it gives an insight into his imaginative processes. "It's to do with time, with how the piece breathes. That's why it's hard to write short pieces. I've written a piece for the South Bank series, called *Slow Freeze*, and it really doesn't have a beginning, an end. I could say that of all my pieces, but this presents a more radical aspect of that. It's like a fragment of something that began its life somewhere in the past, and could go on forever."

This frustrates listeners whose sense of musical event demands a beginning, a middle and an end. When Birtwistle's *Panic* was performed at the 1995 Last Night of the Proms, there was a somewhat contrived uproar about what damage this did to the cherished (by some) institution that the Last Night has become ('Last Night of the Proms' — Today, 'Last night of Proms' — *Daily Express*: 'You get the picture'). For Birtwistle, there is no more chance of setting out to please his audience, than there is of setting out to shock it. "I don't think that creativity is negotiable. It's for those who appreciate it, I can't be responsible for the audience. I'm not running a restaurant."

If this seems elitist, Birtwistle responds, "It's by them drawing away from me, rather than by me drawing away from them. *Panic* is quite a fun piece. It's got a drummer, it's got an upright saxophone virtuoso, its soundworld is not at all that extraordinary. It's simply when it's put in that context, you hear things like it at the cinema all the time. What would have happened if it'd been a piece by Xenakis? The fuss was about something else, it wasn't a criticism of my piece."

Some composers might view the future as a symptom of the superannation that afflicts the institutions of classical music, whether the symphony orchestra, the opera house, or the middle class, middlebrow nully of the Last Night of the Proms. Birtwistle agrees that the Last Night is "a celebration of nothing", but he certainly doesn't reject the symphony orchestra or the opera house. "There is nothing else. Orchestras are highly expert, highly virtuosic, and the opera house is a huge organisation with a tradition about how opera happens, so that is the voice you use, even though it's in a dangerous state. Mind you, when it comes to putting on my operas, I've had a lot of bad luck where I haven't had my finger in the pie, particularly in Germany, where they don't indulge in simple storytelling, they bring a psychological interpretation to it. I think you can do both, but some of my pieces have even been incomprehensible to me. Opera is difficult enough anyway, but if someone is meant to die, you have to stick a knife in them; it can't be a metaphor for death." "Secret Theatres opens on 12 April at London's South Bank: see *Soundings* for details.

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pleasure seeker

Chicago House innovator **Larry Heard** is yet another victim of music industry prejudice and conservatism — but he's kicking back. Interview by Peter Shapiro

Despite the fact that he's been making his living as a hip-hop producer, arranger in Brooklyn, and as an actor, ignored in their home city for 15 years (and for the fiercely minimal, 909 kick-drum workouts released by Chicago labels such as Rude! Capital and Radical Fear failed to lift the blinkers off) the eyes of a city that cultivates its 50-year-old blues tradition as a theme park for tourists and slumming yuppies.

It's a stifling environment that frustrates Larry Heard no end. Working on his own as Mr. Fingers, or with vocalist Robert Owens as Fingers Inc., Heard has played a huge role in changing the face of Bronx youth culture. With such tracks as "Mystery Of Love" and "Washing Machine", he recorded some of Acid House's most innovative music. "Can You Feel It", on the other hand, single-handedly created the warm, aish textures of Deep House. In Heard's hometown, however, nobody wants to know. "Chicago's boring and conservative," he told me when I met him recently in London. "There are no real outlets for different genres of music. We hear the same stuff you hear on Capital or Radio One, anything outside that and you're on your own to seek that out. Internationally there are outlets

of record business, his music is almost obsessively concerned with pleasure and sensation. His early records, especially "Washing Machine" and "Can You Feel It", were sensual expressions of the freedom unleashed by discovering a totally new sound. They were also defiant declarations of intent from a musician who was suffocated by both the corporate stases and petty jealousies of the music industry. "Those early records were things that were coming out at the back end of playing drums for a lot of years — things that were bottled up. I had ideas, but I was stifled because I was the drummer. Don't tell me I haven't got any ideas just because you're the one standing out front. I finally had to cut myself loose from that. I went out and bought myself a keyboard because I was attracted by synthesizers, when I started hearing them in records. It really drew me in, I wanted to know more. "Mystery Of Love", "Washing Machine", that stuff just came out. I mean I didn't even have the keyboard for any amount of time. How do you plan that? They just happened. When I was working with Robert [Owens], I don't even remember rehearsing. He'd come over and we'd just go on tape. Sometimes the first thing you do is the best."

Heard's new releases are more thought out and considered. They still show the same concern with pleasure, but the early records shine above the rest in a minimalist, barely pedestrian fad of the first wave of house music. His forthcoming *Allen* album is an extended thing of outer space, but is thankfully "nothing like a concept album" (a concept might suggest "I'm a little motherfucker" at some books). *House Music* is a CD that does us space travel and things you'd imagine. "Allen," he explains, "I was basically trying to see how much I could do what I was reading and a purpose. It's a conceptual film that relates to it. Music can never really be a real thing, but maybe it can put you in a sense of what that being in our space and listening to a new thing is."

Of his *Allen* film, *Allen* is a series of Scenes Not songs, he said. "Allen" is the precursor to *Allen* because I was trying with both the elements and outer realms. Allen is the concept was just doing some things. I was trying to make musical pictures. The first *Scenes Not Songs* was a concept. It was done off the cuff in a matter of days. The album was more thought about and more time was needed to make it more fluid."

Heard's working in an environment that has stacked the odds against not only himself, but simple human dignity as well. Heard continues to struggle against the constraints of a spectacularly parasitic industry. "The yearning for knowledge and ideas made me. It just gets redirected by your environment and trying to maintain yourself, so you don't let it on. The chore of just maintaining your life is so much more when you're dealing with the music and... I'm trying to sell records that you don't really want to hear about anything else." Allen is out. *Allen* Black Market (through Soul Train). The second volume of *Scenes Not Songs* has just been released by PMA, 333 S State Street, W. 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604-3900, USA.

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There are no two ways about it: **Yoko Ono** has led an extraordinary life. Descended from where she became both person to and collaborator with some of the most influential figures met John Lennon, and was transformed in the public imagination from radical art-feminist Sean Lennon, and producing some of her most galvanising music for years.

flux a life in

Japanese emigre and feminist, she survived the bombing of Hiroshima to move to New York, to 50th-century music including LaMonte Young, John Cage and Ornette Coleman. Then she hit the glass ceiling responsible for breaking up The Beatles. Now she is working with her son
New York interview by Jay Press

"I never will forget the dawn in the Abbey Road Studio when John and I hugged each other after completing the Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band record. When I was a little girl, I read of Monsieur and Madame Curie discovering radium, with, naturally, the Madame sitting in the driver's seat. That was how I felt. I was a composer who was stretching her ears to the edge of the boundless universe."

—Yoko Ono, liner notes to the London Jam CD, from Onobox

Standing in the vestibule of the Dakota building in New York's Manhattan, I tell the guard "I'm here to see Yoko Ono." It seems like a stupid, surreal thing to say — like announcing, "I've got a pizza delivery for the Pope" — but he lets me in anyway. Upstairs, Yoko is sitting in her kitchen, a vast room as big as my entire apartment, with sofas and a television at one end, and a mosaic-topped kitchen table at the other. Dressed in a plain black shirt and stonewashed jeans, she chainsmokes slim cigarettes and speaks in skewed English. Contrary to myth, she turns out to be funny, self-effacing and surprisingly mummy, when her son Sean shows up, she fusses and frets that he'll be late for his voice lesson.

Every so often I have to remind myself: this is one of the most famous women in the world, a woman who was also, once, a key member of the Fluxus movement, a leading performance artist and "High Priestess of the Happening", and collaborator with John Cage, David Tudor, LaMonte Young and Ornette Coleman. Her music in the 60s and early 70s was groundbreaking, on such albums as *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band* and *Fly* she merged rock 'n' roll and New York downtown avant-gardism. Years before Patti Smith, Sinead O'Connor or Diamanda Galas, Yoko invented "the scream": a spectacular eruption of shamanic female energy, dervish-whirling through soundscapes as hybrid and chaotically miscegenated as her own East-meets-West upbringing. She was an ardent feminist whose performance art, films and music aggressively addressed women's oppression. Yet in one fell swoop her own

PHOTO © MICHAEL LANE



PHOTO © MICHAEL LEWIS

achievements were eclipsed when she threw in her lot with John Lennon. Suddenly the arc of Yoko Ono's career nosedived, she went from diva of the avant garde to dragprincess.

In 1992, as the world began to re-evaluate some of the feminist figures haunting that voice known as 'women in rock,' Yoko was asked to compile her life's work for a five CD set called *Onobox*. It got rave reviews and attention from young musicians who had only ever known her as a cultural panath — the woman who broke up The Beatles. Courtney Love, Yoko's modern-day shadow, promptly claimed Ono as her patron saint, and even named a song after her "Twenty Years At The Dakota".

Now, four years after *Onobox*, Yoko has made a return to her avant garde roots with *Rang*, her most uncompromising album since *Fly*. She is accompanied by IMA, a group of age teenage musicians spearheaded by son Sean Ono Lennon. And later this year, her record company will release remixed and cover versions of songs from *Rang*, recorded by young Ono fans like Thurston Moore, The Beastie Boys, Ticky Ween and female Japanese-American art-popsters Cibo Matto. "I didn't know there were so many brothers and sisters out there thinking in the same direction as me," Yoko tells me. She sounds genuinely astonished.

Remember the holes in your mind

Yoko Ono is descended from emperors and samurai. Her father was a concert pianist turned Tokyo banker who, legend has it, often measured his daughter's hands to see whether they were big enough for her to be a first-rate pianist. (They weren't — she's a tiny woman.) Yoko spent most of her childhood in Japan, including some very hard years during World War Two. When she was 20 the family moved to upstate New York, where she went to Sarah Lawrence College. There she discovered Schoenberg and spent much of her time trying to find the right outlet for her fierce creative impulses. "I felt that I was a misfit in every medium," she has said. "I thought that there might be some people who needed something more than painting, poetry and music, something I called an 'additional art'."

John Cage changed the course of Yoko's life, pointing the way towards an interdisciplinary art. In 1958 Yoko and her first husband Toshi Ichiyanagi, a young Japanese musician, attended Cage's experimental music composition class at the New School in New York City. The class attracted a panoply of young avant garde painters, writers and musicians — including Jim Dine, Richard Maxfield, Larry Poons and Allan Kaprow — who embraced Cage's notions of incorporating indeterminacy and chance into art. By offering her gigantic *Chambers Street* loft as a performance space, a la Dadast Cabaret Voltaire, Yoko helped foster this burgeoning experimental scene. Her friend LaMorne Young, newly arrived from Berkeley, performed there, as did Henry Flynt (who coined the term 'concept art'), electronic composer Richard Maxfield, and Yoko herself.

At the time, Yoko was working on conceptual art that she called "Instruction Pieces" (*Painting To Be Stopped On* consisted of the instruction "Leave a piece of canvas or finished painting on the floor or in the street"), and doing performance art happenings. One of her earliest happenings, *A Graphical In The World Of Park*, was a multimedia work in which the performers wore contact microphones to capture the sound of perspiration and other "sounds you hear in silence" — her words echoing Cage's statement that "My favourite piece is the one we hear all the time if we are quiet." George Maciunas, soon to be ringleader of the Fluxus movement, was smitten by Yoko's stuff and asked her to exhibit in his gallery. With its Zen humour and interactively confrontational qualities, Yoko's work fitted the Fluxus vision of 'total art'

perfectly: action, sound, movement, poetry and visuals brought together in a multimedia soup that melted the membrane between everyday life and art.

Throughout her career Yoko tweaked taboos by flaunting the female body in her work, from the infamous performance *Cut Piece* to the film *Fly*, in which a camera follows a fly crawling over the landscape of a woman's nude form. Even today, the concept of *Cut Piece* resonates. Yoko knelt onstage with a pair of sharp scissors and asked the audience to cut the clothes off her body until she was naked and exposed. Exploring notions of voyeurism, violence, and victimisation, it's one of her earliest and most powerful feminist statements.

In retrospect, *Cut Piece* seems dangerous, even foolhardy. Yoko admits that she can't imagine doing it now. But back then, she recalls, "There was the feeling that I wouldn't respect myself if I didn't have that courage. There was always that notion in me that art should come first to a dedicated artist, and life comes second." Luckily, *Cut Piece* had a built-in obsolescence point, since Yoko always wore her best suit for



Yoko Ono and Ornette Coleman Quartet

LENDING PHOTO: JEFFREY MAYER

each performance: "My wardrobe went down very rapidly, until there were maybe two clothes left," she chuckles. "But the feeling was to use my best clothes — for art's sake."

From the early 60s onward, Yoko's voice became her trademark, a visceral wail. Roland Barthes's "language lined with flesh." Her vocal techniques emerged gradually, she says, out of a desire to find new sounds — interior or imaginary sounds. After experimenting with ambient noises and musique concrète, she started reciting poetry in performances, "accentuating syllables in a strange, almost dissonant musical way." While preparing for a show at the Carnegie Recital Hall in 1961, Yoko had a flashback to her childhood in Japan which further inspired her. "I still hadn't gone through the experience of childbirth then, but I remembered that when I was a very little girl, I overheard these servants talking about how painful it is to bring a child into the world." The servants' yawning re-enactment of labour stuck in Yoko's mind.

"I remember it even now, exactly how it sounded," she explains, panting and moaning for me. "Around that time in 1961, I had a miscarriage, or an abortion," she mutters under her breath. "And that reminded me of those stories. So I thought, I'm going to try to recreate that sound of a woman giving birth." She recorded the groans, but when she went to play it back, she accidentally hit the reverse button. The

result was so spooky and weird that "I rehearsed it to simulate the backwards sounds that's how it all started."

Aside from singing 'backwards', Yoko also absorbed a style of Japanese kabuki called *heta* "which requires you to strain your voice a bit." The child of a Buddhist mother and a Christian father, Yoko was perfectly placed to syncretize East and West. Much of her early work was meditative and owed its spiritual force to Buddhism. She said at the time, "I think of my music more as a [Zen] practice [gō] than as music." And her performance art often drew upon the natural world, as in 1962's *Wind Piece*, in which she invited the punters to move their chairs aside to make an aisle for the wind to pass through.

Who was in those early audiences? Was it mostly other artists? "The avant-garde scene in New York was very large, and a lot of people would show up," she explains. "I had a mailing list of about 200 people. In those days, because I was very work-oriented, I would do a concert or an exhibition once a month, almost. I thought that was 'success,' you know, not knowing there was another world where a million people buy your records."

Yoko admits that she was hurt by sexism, as rifle in the macho avant-garde art world as anywhere else. When male artists go out on a limb they are considered brilliant and daring, but when women do the same, they are crazy. "Crazy or downright annoying," she agrees. "Many times I was not invited to a group show or to perform, so I had to do a concert on my own. In hindsight, maybe that helped me."

Yoko still bumps into some of her old Fluxus colleagues on occasion, thanks to a resurgence of public interest in the movement and various retrospective exhibitions, former Fluxus artists sometimes find themselves corralled in a room for group photos. Today, former pals like LaMonte Young and Terry Riley are practically demigods to a certain circle of younger musicians, but Yoko seems wary of discussing them.

"I admit LaMonte Young's talent," she says stiffly, "but there should be equal respect, you know?" He doesn't respect you? "Ah, I don't want to go into it. There is always an ego problem among artists. I suppose with the kind of work that he's doing, it is very important that he have an incredible pride to carry him along. We were all like that."

Choose your cliché: Yoko the cold, calculating bitch who leached on Lennon's fame and fortune, or Yoko the martyred wife who sacrificed her brilliant career for her husband. The reality, as usual, wavers between these two extremes. But in terms of the public perception of Yoko Ono, there's no getting around the fact that racism and sexism played a big role in her demarcation. Think of *The Rules*, Eric Idle's Beatles satire, in which Yoko's equivalent was transposed into a leather-clad, goose-stepping Nazi. And *Esquire* magazine once ran the headline "John Lennon's Exclusive Grouper." Of the blatant, unmitigated prejudice, Yoko says quietly, "That was a situation that all of us Japanese-Americans went through at the time. But then I was singled out to be personally attacked. What was that about? At the time I was thinking, why, why me? But something good might have come out of it, in the sense of making me stronger."

Yoko met John Lennon in 1966. At the time she had showings at two hip London galleries, after years of critical neglect she was finally hitting her stride as an art star. Which is why critics have suggested that, in terms of her career, meeting Lennon was the worst thing that could have happened to her.

"I don't agree with that at all," she insists. "I was stuck in the avant-garde thing. Where do you go from there? If I had insisted on staying there, I could've been known

as the person who never budged from her belief, and been canonized by now." Like LaMonte Young? "Yeah. But the fact that I rolled around in the mud, so to speak, was very good for me. By going off with John into a totally different world I got so much inspiration. Yes, on a career level maybe I lost credence totally. Maybe not totally well, almost totally." She takes a deep breath and lets out a nervous gasp. "I always had this innate confidence that my artistic activity will not be killed. Even if I had to stay put for a whole year to get pregnant, that was fine — I thought, one day I'll use that experience to make something out of it."

Surprisingly, Yoko insists that she was an outcast in the avant-garde community even before she took up with a pop star. She made a film called *Bottoms/Film #4* two hours of bare bums which Yoko called "an amiss petition signed by people with their anuses." After the film's release, she says, "All my avant-garde friends dropped me because I got a tremendous amount of attention and reviews. This nice avant-garde artist couple had a dinner party, and the wife told me 'My husband feels like you sold out and we're not inviting you for dinner.' I was stuck in a strange place, up in the air. I was not in the avant-garde world but I was not as big as the [mainstream] world that John was in 1967 was a very lonely passage, it was like I was in nowhere land. That's when John noticed my work. And he picked me up!"

Not only did Lennon rescue Yoko from her limbo, he also introduced her to a whole new kind of music: rock 'n' roll. Ono's radical vocals and mystical mindset combined with Lennon's raw rock sensibilities in a way that was sheer sorcery. Their first joint experiments with looped tapes and sound collages, *Unhushed Music No. 2* (Two Virgins [recorded about the same time as *Revolution No. 9*], Lennon's Stockhausen-influenced noise collage on 1968's *The Beatles*) were out-and-out avant-garde. But with Yoko Ono Plastic Ono Band (1970) and *Fly* (1971), the couple combined experimental production, freeform jazz spontaneity and rock 'n' roll primitivism. On the riotous "Why," Ono's voice seems to transcend the limits of her body, searing and soaring over the Bo Diddley-esque beat and Lennon's sulphurous guitar, on its sequel, "Why Not," Ono gargles strangled syllables over a bluesy groove, sounding like a child that's been skinned alive. Consider the John Cale-LaMonte Young-Yoko Ono nexus, and you realise that Yoko Ono Plastic Ono Band and *Fly* — in their exploration of noise and the mantic powers of repetition — are an unacknowledged parallel to The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat*.

"When John and I got together I was not thinking pop music so much as rock," Yoko explains, dragging on her sixth cigarette. "I was interested in that strong, heavy beat, which I equated with the heartbeat. I thought avant-garde music is mainly for the head — most male avant-garde composers avoided the voice because it was too animalistic. They were into very cool instrumental kind of things. Cool was in, and by using my voice I was a little uncool in their eyes. Strange, isn't it? The sound of my voice was too human and emotional. Because of that, I kind of rebelled against that avant-garde tendency and I went more animalistic. When I heard the rock beat, I thought, oh this is what I was looking for! And I never looked back."

Although those records met with a mostly hostile reception from critics and public alike, Yoko says, "We hit, John and I, that we created a whole new sound, a new world. Even though most people were busy throwing our records in the trashcan! I didn't expect that — we thought the whole world would recognize that this is a new

"After John's passing, I fell into music like a security blanket. Doing elaborate harmonies or instrumentals was a way of getting into a more complex place, which was therapeutic"



Memorabilia, India Gallery 1966

sound." So the couple believed they had created a "New Music" that was "a fusion of avant garde jazz rock and East and West." For *Ry*, Yoko recruited her old Fluxus pal Joe Jones to create one-of-a-kind sculpture-instruments "which played themselves without any musicians" (as she explained in the Onobox notes). And she utilized various items of exotic percussion like tablas and Cuban claves.

At roughly the same time, the likes of Miles Davis, Can and Tim Buckley were on a similar genre-crunching trip. The lock-groove freak-outs "Touch Me" and "Mind Train" (which a strangely humble Yoko edited from 17 minutes down to four for Onobox, to "spare the listener") are remarkably similar to the punk-funk jazz fission of Miles's *On The Corner*. Similarly, "Don't Count The Waves" and "The Path" are proto-dub explorations of echo and studio space that reverberate with cosmic dust and radiowaves. They sound weirdly like parallels to Can tracks such as "August" from *Togo* *Mago*.

Was Yoko aware of what these other artists were doing? "No, I didn't connect that at all," she says icily, and perhaps a little disingenuously. "Okay. So I thought Miles Davis was probably doing something great, but I thought it was just instrumental stuff. And it probably was. The vocal thing I thought of as separate." It seems hard to believe that Ono was unaware of Davis's work on *Bitches Brew*, a big hit with counterculture "heads." But perhaps this brings us back to her earlier point about artist's egos — it was only her unswerving belief that she was out on her own, creating a new musical universe, that propelled her through all the barriers that the art world threw in her path.

These two early albums elicited some of the best playing of their careers out of Lennon, Ringo Starr, and even Eric Clapton. How did she do it? "I think it was a lot to do with John," she says. "It was always in the context of doing his [recording] sessions. It was like, you're here anyway, why not do Yoko's song? It's not like we made phone calls and said, 'We're going to do Yoko Ono's stuff now, let's get into the studio.' It wasn't like that at all. 'Midsummer New York,' for instance, I think it was two in the morning and all that time we were doing John's stuff. Everybody's tired and John says, 'Let's do this one song Yoko showed me this morning.' And it's like, okay." She rolls her eyes in a superb imitation of bored, patronizing musicians. "I was always an afterthought. But it worked out well."

"On Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band, you hear John saying 'Did you get that?' I kept it in because most of the time when we did my stuff, all the engineers picked that time to go to the bathroom. They couldn't stand it probably! A lot of things were not taped, and a lot of things were lost in my life." Although many of her early instruction pieces were published in the book *Grapefruit*, Yoko says that much of her work has vanished over the years. "If I were a guy that wouldn't happen. I heard that Allen Ginsberg's mother kept everything that he wrote since he was three. It must be a big lie. But in my life, a lot of things happened to me, and the war." She says, alluding to her childhood experiences in war-torn Japan. "I'm lucky I kept a few things. Women's career is not taken seriously, so no one's keeping an archive for you."

There's no way back so just keep walking

After the extremism of those two shattering records, anything less untethered was bound to sound tame in comparison. Yoko's post-*Fly* work in the 1970s was feverishly feminist, but socially sedate and session-musically. She was palling around with Yippies Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin (her Fluxus-honed instinct for the spectacle melted perfectly with their pranksterish sensibilities), and attending to numerous cool causes.

Her collaborative album with Lennon, *Somebody In New York City*, and her solo records, *Approximately Infinite Universe* (backed by the happy group Elephant's Memory) and *Feeling The Space*, featured such forthright songs as "What A Bastard The World Is" ("All of us live under the mercy of male society thinking that their want is our need") and "Potentially Rocker," a loose, jazzy slip of a song dedicated "to wives of rockers who are nameless, who live in the shadow of groupies and who get a weekend loving once every month... between the tours spaced with cribs and gonorrhea." Stray moments of intense strangeness found their way onto these records, such as the eerie "YangYang," and "Woman Power," one of the few mid-period songs which really succeeded in fusing powerful politics to equally powerful rock. A stomping Amazonian trade recorded in 1973, "Woman Power" anticipated



John and Yoko

PHOTO: REYNOLDS

the marriage of Metal riffs and rap bombast more than a decade before Run-DMC sampled Aerosmith for "Walk This Way."

Despite such strident pro-women rhetoric, Yoko wasn't a big hit with the radical feminists because she stood by her man at a time when separatism was in vogue. To women who felt overshadowed by men, Yoko was living proof. "You're right — feminists didn't like me either. I was just a rich man's wife to them. That was the initial stage when feminists were totally down on wives and prostitutes," she says gleefully. Ironically, the late 70s saw Lennon and Ono grow into the ultimate roles-reversed couple: he was house-husband, baking bread and looking after the infant Sean, while she managed a business empire that some estimate at \$100 million.

At the dawn of the 80s Yoko turned to electronic technology. "Walking On Thin Ice," the last track she created with Lennon, is one of her best, most disturbing pop songs over a motorik disco pulse. Yoko croons softly while sonic detritus careers and crashes around her. Much of *Double Fantasy*, *Season Of Glass* (co-produced by Phil Spector) and *It's Alright* are peppered with synthesizers and lush, multi-tracked vocals (she used 81 tracks on the epic "Never Say Goodbye," a herculean task in the days before mixing disks were computerized). She explains: "In the 80s, after John's passing, I really fell into music in a way that was like a security blanket. I needed to hold onto something. Doing something elaborate, like elaborate harmonies or instrumentals, was a way of getting into a more complex place, which was therapeutic. It made me feel there was a whole new world I was delving into." She chose to use actual gunshots in the staccato, atonal epic "No, No, No," and later wrote that she had finally learned what music concretely really meant.

When asked for specifics about her interaction with technology, Yoko grows a little vague, saying only that she's always been involved in twiddling knobs in the studio. A

statement that seems overly modest, considering that she has produced or co-produced every one of her albums. "Sometimes I get into that kind of thing," she says, "and sometimes I think about the fact that in the computer age we get more and more removed from ourselves, and I want to go back to the simple animal in us. I hate it when things get too academic. If I play with technique, I want to play with it towards an end. Otherwise it can stunt you. In classical music, people were doing very complex things, for the sake of being complex. I learned that rock, with two simple chords, can bring an incredible communication of the spirit."

The way Yoko tells it, *Rising* closes a circle that began with Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band, in more ways than one. Firstly, it is a return to uncompromising art rock. The album opens with the roaring Speed Metal pummeling and vocal convulsions of "Warzone." Then there's the requiem "Kurushi" (a Japanese word which vaguely translates into "torured" or "suffocating"), the wonderfully italy "Ask The Dragon," and "Rising" itself, a lovely song in which plaintive chants dissolve, over 14 minutes, into naked grief and cathartic chaos.

On a personal level, *Rising* is also, says Yoko, "a reminder of when John and I did Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band. It was that kind of feeling. I felt that Sean was very supportive of me, just like John. So there were no silly questions — you know 'Why are you screaming Yoko?'"

When Sean was a small boy, his voice often appeared on Yoko's records. I suggest that he probably absorbed her aesthetic sensibility from the womb onwards. But Yoko insists that she was taken aback by his interest in her music and his desire to play (alongside Sam Koppelman and Timo Ellis) on *Rising*. "I naturally assumed that when he grew up he would respect his father's work a lot. I never thought he would even listen to mine. I never pushed it or even explained it to him, but then I'm seeing him playing my old records and... I was surprised."

This seems rather modest to me, and not a little sad. Why wouldn't a son be interested in his mother's work? "My work is the work of an outsider, and his dad is very mainstream..." She pauses. "Well, he created the mainstream! So it's natural for Sean to go to that. But the fact that I was an underdog probably appealed to him. And it's worked out very well for the mother and son relationship!"

Rising came into being after playwright Ron Destro approached Yoko to write some songs for his play *Hiroshima*, timed for the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the city. The first song she wrote was "Hiroshima Sky Is Always Blue," recorded with Paul McCartney last year but not included on the album. Scenes in the play's script sparked painful memories: the bombing of Tokyo, hiding in an air raid shelter, moving to the countryside and nearly starving, then returning to the ravaged city where she was surrounded by the walking dead. "I had been wondering why this experience I and all of us New Yorkers are going through now felt familiar — this feeling of tension and insecurity and fear. I was thinking, I remember this feeling, when was the last time I experienced this? And I realised that there was a parallel in my life."

Yoko's first live performance with IMA was at a memorial event held in an ancient shrine near Hiroshima. The songs on *Rising* were rewritten for Japanese drum, Chinese gong, didgeridoo and tablas, and IMA wore kimonos. Although she's mindful of the "One World" idea of melding East and West, she explains that there were practical reasons for the Asian instruments. "It was a thousand year old shrine, a national treasure, and they weren't used to people getting on the stage wearing shoes even. We wanted to respect that — to the point that I think we surprised them. If we used

electric guitars we'd have to have heavy speakers and amplifiers, so I made it all acoustic — acoustic is interesting."

Over the years people have despised Yoko Ono for being too cool, too cocky, too damn "inscrutable." Back in the 60s and 70s, with her hot-pants and black beret, her anger and pronouncements about changing the world, she was as threatening to the pop status quo as any angry young woman could be. Now aged 63 and a widow, she may find the public more sympathetic. Her rage is still intact, but tempered by a lifetime of humiliations and misfortunes, she seems more like a sage than a virago. The keynote to *Rising* might be found in the title track "Have courage/Have rage/We're strong." The message is clear ("We're all victims of the immaturity of the human race, and we can all stand up together and do something about it," as she paraphrases it for me), but filtered through some of Yoko's most wondrously virtuosic singing.

“Rising was a reminder of when John and I did Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band. I felt that Sean was very supportive of me, just like John. There were no silly questions like, why are you screaming Yoko?”

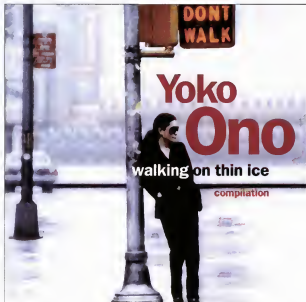
I ask whether she prepared or rehearsed her vocals in advance. "For a song like 'I'm Dying', the band started playing and the first words that came to my mind were 'I'm dying.' And I thought, 'Am I gonna say that?' There was a little resistance, because I didn't want the whole world to think, 'Oh, she's dying.' But I thought I should say it — daring to not censor yourself. It is a bit frightening, but that's how it is. My feeling is that it's a matter of attitude — if you think that what you feel now is an accumulation of 60-something years, then anything that comes out now is okay. Then you don't have to prepare. Just let it come." *Rising* is released by EMI/Capitol.

Yoko and IMA



Ice maiden cometh

Our April offer: bag a choice Yoko Ono compilation plus a year's supply of *The Wire* for just £30



Yoko Ono: *Walking On Thin Ice*

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THE WIRE
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By applying philosophical rigour to sonic disruption, the German **Mille Plateaux** label has become a nexus for resistant musicians such as **Oval** and **Alec Empire**. In Frankfurt, Simon Reynolds makes the connections between Techno, post-structuralist theory, digital disobedience and hypermodern jazz

100 theories

Frankfurt is simultaneously Germany's financial capital and a longstanding centre of anti-capitalist theory. Most famously, it gave the world the 'Frankfurt School' of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer et al — neo-Marxist thinkers who fled Nazism and landed up in Southern California, where their eyes and ears were affronted by the kitsch outpourings of Hollywood's dream-factory. Today, the Frankfurt School is mostly remembered for its snooty attitude towards popular culture, which it regarded as the 20th century's opiate-of-the-people, a soul-degrading inferior to High Modernism. Adorno in particular has achieved a dubious immortality in the Cultural Studies world, as an Aunt Sally figure initially bashed by academics as a prequel to their semantic readings of 'anti-hegemonic resistance' encoded in Madonna videos and *Star Trek*.

There's no denying Adorno deserves denison for his infamously suspect comments about the "eunuch-like sound" of jazz, whose secret message was "give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated — and you will be accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you". But in other respects Adorno's critique of pop culture's role as safety valve and social control is not so easily shrugged off. Witness his remarks on the swing-inspired frenzies of the 'jitterbug': "Their ecstasy is without content... It has convulsive aspects reminiscent of St Vitus' dance or the reflexes of mutilated animals." Adorno's verdict on jitterbugs — "merely to be carried away by anything at all, to have something of their own, compensates for their impoverished and barren existence" — could easily be transposed to 90s rave culture, which — from Happy Hardcore to Gabba to Goa trance — is now as rigidly ritualised and conservative as Heavy Metal.

The Frankfurt-based label Mille Plateaux shares something of Adorno's oppositional

attitude to mass culture. For label boss Achim Szepanski, Germany's rave history — which dominates the pop mainstream — is so institutionalised and ritualised it verges on the totalitarian. Adorno-style, he psychoanalyses Ecstasy culture as "a metonymic search for mother-substitutes... Ecstasy can be your new mother". Alec Empire, a Mille Plateaux solo artist and prime mover in his own Berlin-based anti-rave scene Digital Hardcore, is more blunt: "Rave is dead, it's boring. House is 'deco' and Techno is Progressive rock." As for Oval, Mille Plateaux's 'Star act', when asked about their relationship to Techno, they seem astonished by the question "Relationship?" (they reply).

Influenced by post-structuralist theory and named after a gargantuan tract by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Mille Plateaux release 'deconstruction Electronica', situating their activity both within and against the genre conventions of post-rave styles like Intelligent Techno, House, Jungle and Trip-Hop. Mille Plateaux identify these music's 'premature closures and seize their missed opportunities'. The results may not offer the easy satisfactions of less ambitious Techno labels/outlets, but they do constitute the most consistently stimulating catalogue in the post-rave universe.

One January weekend, I find Szepanski at his Frankfurt apartment, which doubles as HQ for his four labels (Mille Plateaux, Force Inc, Rot Beats and Force Inc USA), and is located in the city's sleazy equivalent to King's Cross (handy for late-night club-hoppers and hookers). Having read his Deleuze-style press releases (lots of references to "sound-fshams" and "disjunctivatingularities") and conducted a theory-dense e-mail conversation, I'm expecting a rather severe



Achim Stropanski

PHOTO: BRUCE A. HEAD (LEFT); MAGDALENE



Gilles Deleuze

individual. But over the course of the weekend, Achim reveals some unexpected sides to his character: a dry sense of humour, a soft spot for plastic pop (he owns CDs by TLC and Kylie Minogue) and an awesome talent for piss-artistry.

Plagued by a mysterious ailment, he spends most of Saturday sipping homeopathic remedies and complaining that he's too ill to undertake a planned excursion to see Chicago House DJ and Force Inc. artist Gene Farris spin at a club in nearby Mainz. At midnight, he decides he's just about up to it. For the first five hours, Achim's sports remain low, despite an alcohol intake rate of three beers to my one. But by 6am and beer number 12, Achim is flailing on the dancefloor, enraptured by Farris's trippy set. Every few minutes, he accosts someone to bilinearly proclaim: "Gene Farris is the best House DJ in the world! I don't care, I will tell anyone — Josh Wink, Laurent Garnier — to their face Farris is the best."

Now aged 35, Szepanski got involved in student politics in the radical, post-1968 climate of the mid-70s. He read Marx, flirted with Maoism, protested about conditions in the German prison system. Later in the decade he immersed himself in the post-punk experimentalist scene alongside the likes of DAF, playing in the industrial group P16D4. In the 80s he went back to college, watched the Left die and got very depressed, consoling himself with alcohol and the misanthropic philosophy of Coran.

Two late 80s breakthroughs pulled him out of the mire: his encounter with the post-structuralist thought of Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, et al, and his excitement about HipHop and House. While still working on a doctorate about Foucault, he started the first DJ-oriented record store in Frankfurt and founded the Blackout label. By the early 90s Szepanski was dropping out to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizoanalysis*, a colossal tome that Foucault hailed as "an introduction to the non-fascist life".

For Achim, the experience was revelatory and galvanising. Deleuze and Guattari's theories showed him "that you don't have to be negative or sad if you want to be militant, even if what you fight against is very bad. The Frankfurt School and Marxism has a very linear interpretation of history and a top-down view of society, whereas Deleuze and Guattari say that society is more than just the economy and the state, it's a multitude of sub-systems and local struggles".

From this notion, Achim conceived the strategy of comedy-based subversion which informs his labels: hard Techno and House with Force Inc., Electronica with Mille Plateaux, Jungle with Riot Bears, TripHop with the Electric Ladyland compilations. These interventions are somewhere between parody and noose, demonstrating by deed not discourse what these genres could really be like if they lived up to or exceeded their accompanying "progressive" rhetoric.

Founded in 1991, Force Inc. was initially influenced by Detroit renegades Underground Resistance, not just sonically, but by "their whole anti-corporate, anti-commodification-of-dance stance". In its first year, Force Inc.'s neo-Detroit-influenced Acid sound had a lot of impact. At the same time, the label was involved in the underground party scene, organising "guerrilla events at strange locations, without all the tricks and special effects that you get at normal discos". But in 1992, as the Acid revival took off and Frankfurt took over, Force Inc. "made a radical break", towards a breakbeat-oriented hardcore that was a weird parallel to the proto-jungle emerging in Britain.

Szepanski and Force Inc. deserve respect for recognising so precociously the radicalism of the then university adored *Akron*. They even loved the much cruder accelerated 'squeaky voice' tracks that ruled in 1992.

Maybe it was just our peculiar warped interpretation, but the sped-up vocals sounded like a serious attempt to deconstruct some of the ideologies of pop music. One dimension to this was using voices like instruments or noise, destroying the pop ideology that says that the voice is the expression of the human subject."

And so Force Inc. embarked upon its own "abstract industrial take on UK breakbeat", mashing together harsh sonorities and angelic samples over ultra-fast breakbeats, as on Bochoy C's inimitable "Hells Bells", available on the recent Force Inc. anthology *Rauschen 10*. Achim also licensed UK tracks such as NRG's super-serious "I Need Your Love" and material by Force Mass Motion. "We did some great parties, our DJ friend Sasha playing much faster than the English DJs, at 200

bpm, using an altered Technics [deck] cranked up to +40. At this velocity, it was very abstract, coming at you like a sound wall. It worked good for us but nobody else! We were very isolated in Germany."

In 1993-94 Szepeński watched aghast as rave went overground in Germany, with "the return of melody, New Age elements, instantly kitsch harmonies and timbres." With this degeneration of the underground sound came the consolidation of a German rave establishment, centred around the party organisation Mayday and its record label Low Spirit, acts such as Westbam and Marusha, and the music channel Viva TV. The charts were swamped with Low Spirit pop-Tekno smashes such as "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" and "Tears Don't Lie," based on tunes from musicals or German folk music. And the alleged "alternative" to this deck was moribund, middlebrow electro-trance music, as represented by Frankfurt's own Sven Vath and his Harthouse label.

For Achim, what happened to German rave illustrated Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of "deteritorialisation" and "reterritorialisation." Deteritorialisation is when a culture gets all fluffed up — punk, early rave, jungle — resulting in a breakthrough into new aesthetic, social and cognitive spaces. Reterritorialisation is the inevitable stabilisation of chaos into a new order: the internal emergence of style codes and orthodoxies, the external co-optation of subcultural energy by the leisure industry. Szepeński has a groovy German word for what rave, once so liberating, turned into "Freizeitkristall," a "pleasure-prison." Regulated experiences, punctual rapture, predictable music. "Boring!" sneers Achim.

Would he go so far as to describe a kind of aesthetic fascism at work in rave culture? The techniques of mass-mobilisation and crowd-consciousness have similarities to fascism. Fascism was mobilising people for the war-machines, rave is mobilising people for pleasure-machines.

In 1994 Achim started Mille Plateaux. Just as Force Inc. worked with and against the demands of the dancefloor, Mille Plateaux is a kind of answer to "electronic listening music" and the Ambient boom. Achim sees the label's output as the musical prism to Deleuzian theory, fleshing out concepts such as the rhizome (a network of stems that are laterally connected), which is opposed to hierarchical root-systems (such as those found in trees). In music, "rhizomatic" equates with the Enslaved idea of a democracy of sounds, a dismantling of the normal ranking of instruments in the mix (usually privileging the voice or lead guitar). Instead, says Achim, there's a "synthesisation of heterogeneous sounds and material through a kind of composition that holds the sound elements together without them losing their heterogeneity." Announced by the fractal funk and chaos-theorems of Can and early 70s Miles Davis (the "nobody solos, everybody solos" principle), rhizomatic music today takes the form of DJ out 'n' mix (at its rare, daring best), avant garde Hip-Hop and post-rock. And the output of Mille Plateaux, of course.

Another key Deleuze and Guattari trait shared by Mille Plateaux is an interest in schizophrenic consciousness. Achim talks of admiring darkside hardcore for its "paranoia", and mourns the way Jungle traded its vital madness for "serious" musically. "Since the 50s, in musique concrete, in industrial music, in Techno, one heard diverse noises, screaming, creaking, hissing — all noises one related more to madness," he explains. "Echo-effects allow sound hallucinations to occur, they delocalise the perception apparatus, allowing forms of perception to emerge that one had previously attributed to lunatics or schizophrenics." For Achim, as for Deleuze and Guattari, such sensory disorientation is valuable, acting as a deconstruction of "subjectivity."

Last year Szepeński contacted Deleuze himself, sending material by Oval and other Mille artists, and asking if he'd write an essay for Achim's planned anthology of techno theory, *Mischnele Strategie*. The great man wrote back saying he couldn't do it, but gave his blessing to the label, and said that he particularly dug Oval. "He even wrote about specific tracks!" exclaims Achim. "Later, the German publisher of *A Thousand Plateaux* told us this was really quite unusual, to get such a letter."

Not long after, the terminally ill, 70 year old Deleuze committed suicide. Szepeński



Oval

immediately organised the double CD tribute *In Memoriam Giles Deleuze*. Featuring contributions from American post-rockers Rome and Trans Am, DJ-philosopher Spooky, a gaggle of Achim's old allies in the European experimental music scene, and all the usual Mille Plateaux-affiliated suspects (Oval, Mouse On Mars, Cristian Vogel, Ian Pooley, Scanner, Gas, etc.), *In Memoriam* is probably the best thing the label has put out yet. Stand-out tracks include the electroacoustic jiggery-pokery of Alec Empire's "Bon Voyage", the musique concrete Jungle of Christophe Charles's "Underecons/Continuum", and Rome's Cluster-like drone-mosaic "Intermodal".

The ubiquitous Jim O'Rourke also appears, and is working on a sort of O'Rourke versus Mille Plateaux remix project, using the entire Mille catalogue as source material. Techno Animal may also be doing a remix project based around the "versus" concept, *Techno Animal Versus*.

Reality, which will involve five guest collaborators, material will be shuttled back and forth between each artist and the group, eventually resulting in ten versions of five tracks. And then there's Oval, who are currently scheming their way towards a sort of Lesiner versus Oval scenario: a digital authoring system that will enable the punter to make their own Oval records.

Interviewing Oval is, shall we say, challenging. Their methods are obscure, their theory fabulously rarefied, their utterances mangled in irony. All that can be safely said is that Oval's music — however irrelevant aesthetics may be to the trio — offers an uncanny, seductive beauty of treacherous surfaces and labyrinthine recesses.

Ironically, given Oval's polemical engagement with digital culture, my encounter with the trio takes place in one of Frankfurt's new cyber-cafes. Immediately there are communication problems. Humble enquiries about backgrounds and influences are met with rolling of the eyes, smuggers, and "Next question?" Tentative characterisations of their activity are treated as a reduction or misrepresentation of the Oval project. So what are they trying to do?

Put as simply as possible, Oval is "not so much about music as the technical implementation of notions of music," says Markus Popp. "It's an effort in sound-design rather than music with a capital M. The main content of our effort is to have an audible user-interface."

In nuts and bolts terms, this means fucing with the hardware and software that organises and enables today's post-rave Electronica. Most critical of these technologies is MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which allows different pieces of equipment to be co-ordinated like the players in a group, or instrumental "voices" in an orchestra. For Oval, this is precisely the problem. "MIDI is basically a music-metaphor in itself, one that's so deplorably dated. It's so constraining in every

way, you have to go beyond these protocols."

Despite, or rather because of, this technology's reliance on "traditional" music syntax and semantics, Oval deliberately use the set-up, because their real interest is in standardisation. Their first Mille Plateaux release *Systemisch*, explains Sebastian Schatzl, "was done with a very cheap MIDI set-up and a borrowed copy of Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works Vol II*." This later turns out to be an Oval in-joke, apparently, Richard James is one of many artists who have claimed that *Systemisch* was based on their material. "That album is composed of material that is really old, and it got edited, layered and recombined so many times, it's stupid to ask whose music is this?" says Popp. "That is the only truly negligible aspect in our music. Most of the CDs we used were rented, and often they didn't have their covers!"

Getting back to MIDI or a sampler/sequencer software such as Cubase (the power tool of choice for the post-rave generation), Popp complains that "there is so much determinism within these programs, working with them involves so much compliance to principles that are highly critical. In a social context these technologies are mostly used in a controlling way: monitoring the workplace, workplace efficiency, optimising the user-interface. On-line newsgroups are full of people who e-mail back to the manufacturers saying 'We'll need this, change that, and all of this keeps them in front of their computers even longer. Our way of dealing with this is to overcome the manufacturer's distinction between features and bugs'."

Which brings us to the famous Oval deployment of deliberately damaged CDs to generate the raw material of their music: the glitches, skips and distressed cyber-music that makes *Systemisch* and its sequel *94 Diskont* so ear-boggling. The CD-thing is another "reduction" that irks Oval. "We did use CDs, but that is neglectable, there are so many other things we could have used. The important point was that the CD player has no distinction if it's an error or a proper part of the recording, it's just doing calculations, algorithms."

This recalls Hendrix's aestheticisation of feedback, a bug! or improper effect

immanent in the electric guitar but hitherto unexploited. Oval reject terms like 'sabotage' to describe the CD treatments and the more esoteric forms of algorithmic

mischievous they wreak within hardware. But they do use the word "disobedience", which also has a frisson of subversion, and talk, deconstruction-style, of engaging in a kind of non-antagonistic dialogue with corporate digital culture: Sony, IBM, Microsoft, et al

Contradictions abound in Oval's own rhetoric. They speak in almost punk 'anyone-can-do-it' terms of deliberately keeping their activity at the "lowest entry-level", of not wanting "to convey an image of arcane technology and years of expert study in digital signal processing and programming." Yet their discourse is often absurdly forbidding and user-unfriendly. Then there's the way they deny any musical intentions, only to later come close to characterising their project as an enrichment of music. They talk of not wanting to produce a merely "predictable outcome" of the hardware

and software, of wishing to "offensively suggest" the existence of soundworlds "from 'outside' the digital domain", of having invented a "completely new music-paradigm".

Says Popp, "Another aspect of what we wanted to achieve musically is to generate a new kind of perception. In the beginning, some labels sent back the demo tapes because they said there's no music on it!" In that respect, Oval's audio-mazes induce

a "perceptual dissonance" akin to the Op Art of Bridget Riley, or the perspectival chaos of Escher. Sebastian adds "It works the other way: obvious mis-pressings on the albums, or DAT drop-outs on certain compilation tracks, don't get spotted during the production process!"

Future Oval projects include some kind of EP for Mille Plateaux, the US release of *Systemisch* and *Diskont*, accompanied by "exclusive material, possibly predating *Systemisch*", via the ultra-cool label Table Of The Elements, and an "interactive" product designed in collaboration with British computer boffin Richard Ross.

"It is not exactly CD-ROM or hypertext," explains Popp. "But it will involve guiding the user through some kind of design-environment, and basically enabling people to do Oval records themselves. The working title is 'The Public Domain Project', and it will involve a lot of work. We also want to investigate the forthcoming video-disc, maybe there are ways to work with the combination of optical and audio, new potentials. And we are thinking about using the sounds of data processing itself — the sounds the computer or sampler generate when they calculate or process the sound. There is always sound somewhere in the mouse desk, when stuff is stored or [screen] window-boxes get closed or opened. We are thinking of recording this because it is basically the sound of the user-interface itself."



At the other extreme from Oval's oblique strategies lies Alec Empire's. An insouciant anarcho-Tekno Empire and the Oval boys appear to have had some sort of ideological rift; in fact, Popp refuses to comment, but Empire makes a veiled jibe about Oval doing "their music from this very intense theory, whereas I do it not only from books but from what I feel."

An engaging fellow who's constantly laughing, usually at his own utterances, Alec Empire divides his energy between recording solo albums for Mille Plateaux (the sombre *Electronica* of 1995's *Low On Ice*, the zany *Sun Ra* meets Perez Prado

avant EZ-listening of the new *Hypermodern Jazz* 2000.5), and fostering the Berlin-based Digital Hardcore scene. This two-pronged campaign reflects Empire's interestingly jumbled background. On one hand, he studied music theory for a while and, unusually for a Techno artist, uses notation when composing his own music. On the other hand, he was a breakdancer at the age of ten and plying in a punk group by the time he was 12.

At the end of the 80s, Empire got swept up in Berlin's underground party scene. Despite being anti-drugs himself, he embraced Acid's cult of oblivion.

"For a lot of people at the Acid parties, it was about escaping from reality. At the time it made sense, politics seemed futile, with the Left dead, and even the autonomists seeming like silly kids noting for fun."

Continued on page 66



- Disc One**
- 1 Little Bird in the Park of Attractions (The Thin Girl)
 - 2 Rough Embroid
 - 3 Touchwood (The Forest Mix)
 - 4 Jungle Journey (Reptile Mix)
 - 5 Whistling Fields
 - 6 Freiklang (The Break Break Mix)
 - 7 San Rocco
 - 8 Cultivik (Dress-up Mix)
 - 9 Change of the Gods
 - 10 Birds in Cold Tails (The Motown Show Mix)
- Disc Two**
- 1 Touchwood (Flucka Edit)
 - 2 Little Bird in the Park of Attractions (The Radio Edit)
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From The Pop Group to The Maffia and his association with On-U Sound, **Mark Stewart** has carved a niche as the gang leader of agit-prop and dubbed-out P-funk. Interview by Biba Kopf

If Mark Stewart didn't exist, Thomas Pynchon would have had to invent him. The energy that powers Stewart's music comes from the same muck of arcane knowledge and weird science that drives Pynchon's narratives. Think of the novelist's *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which vast gobs of occult history, conjecture and phallic missile demerits are folded into the narrative, the whole held together by sexual heat. That could also serve as a description of most of the music Stewart has produced over the last 15 years or so, from The Pop Group's newly reissued 1979 album *Y* — Stewart was the group's 'democratically-elected' vocalist — to the new *Control Data* session.

The madness of the world has etched lines of experience deep into Stewart's face like Pynchon (and his heroes), at some formative point the singer was bitten by a tenacious tapeworm of a conspiracy theory, and has spent most of his adult life painfully drawing it out into the light.

"One of the songs on *Control Data* is called 'The Half That's Never Been Told,'" he says, explaining how he whittled reams of classified files into the codes that triggered the songs on the new record. "It refers back to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the misleading translations of the Bible, and the CIA operation that stayed behind after the war to destabilise the European Communist Parties. I mean, a lot of it is rubbish, but there's some interesting names coming out of it, right? So you can access all these different things if you want, or just go off into the songs." He pauses and smiles. "Information is stimulating. Some people look at pornography. I look up weird texts."

Ever since The Pop Group's second, unhinged LP *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*, rumours about Stewart's sanity have been rife. And his predilection for talking conspiracy theory simply fuelled notions of his paranoia. But as he somewhat wearily repeats, "A paranoid is someone in possession of all the facts. It's optimistic to know as much about how the world works as you possibly can."

Live, the Stewart worldview comes into clearer focus. His first act of consumption with a London audience in six years occurred inside London's Leisure Lounge in February. Overlapping wall projections conjured the familiar images of terror, but the music created by his group The Maffia — basically fuckhead with Stewart's new keyboards collaborator Simon Mundley, plus Adrian Sherwood at the controls — bonded the heaving mass of the audience into a single unit of resistance. The way Stewart's treated vocals skip suggests of information across the laval waves of rhythm, scatter-shot beats and liquid Metal guitar means you can catch them if you want or leave them to be swallowed up in the flow. A Stewart song inevitably produces some unpleasant fact, but he raises issues on immense uplifts of funk and samfunk noise guitar. "What people seem to miss with my stuff," he says, "is the uplifting thing, the music's funkiness. I was always interested in the funk."

You don't have to squint hard to see how the world has turned to cast Mark Stewart's work in a different light. The success of *Tricky*, *Massive Attack* and *Björk*, not to mention the never ending dropleaf of rap, Techno and ragga hits, have

dissolved the usual arguments about difficulty attached to the noise of the Stewart/Maffia/Sherwood axis. Meanwhile, in Hollywood, Col. remix Nine Inch Nails' opening credits for the film *Seven*, and one-time SPK founder Giorno Reverend pumps out a ferocious hardcore score for the bio-tech SF movie *Strange Days*. The hit TV series *X-Files* has triggered an explosion of media interest in the weird sciences, and the Internet has brought yesterday's covert cultures within reach of anyone with a computer and modem. In 1996 Mark Stewart doesn't seem anywhere near so lonely and friendless as he did back in the 80s.

"I am being head-hunted by these multimedia groups," he relates, bemused. "In the end they might only be interested in building up roads to home shopping webs, but they know there's a lot of intelligent consumers out there, so they'll let you have a little subversive corner."

Regardless of the medium, the target remains fundamentally the same. Back in 1979 with *Y*, Stewart fired off his first broadsides against the mythic control organism that William Burroughs defined as the Ugly Spork. 17 years on, he's still shooting silver bullets to bring down the Beast. The French for an accurate line of fire is *ligne du feu*, and Stewart's line of faith holds steady. "Either you control the data or the data controls you," he suggests, then gamely admits, "I haven't changed since I was 14. I've still got the same attitude."

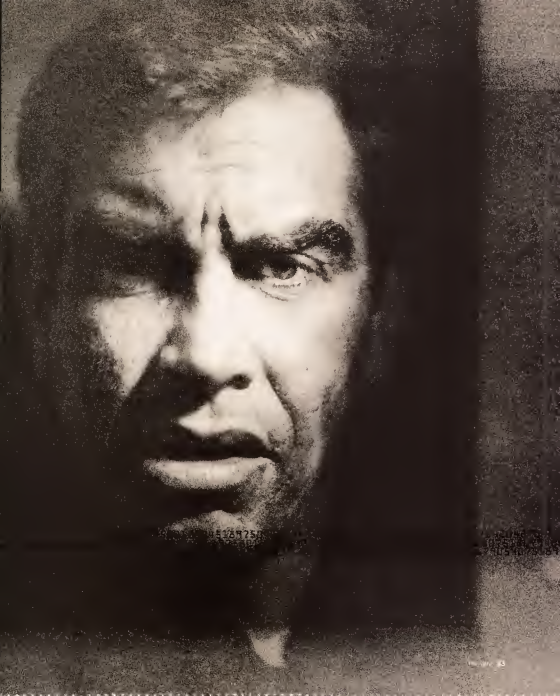
Of course, The Pop Group were far more serious than the Mark Stewart of today, and their songs undoubtedly betray their age. But they're nothing to blush about, and the Dennis Bowel-produced *Y*, with its post-punk, fractured, raging guitar funk, was as right for its time as *Control Data* is for today. "Some of The Pop Group stuff is a little embarrassing, like letters you'd written to some girl at the youth club or something," says Stewart when I ask him what he thinks of it now. "We were 16 and going on tour with Pere Ubu or Patti Smith and then having to come back to do our exams. I mean, songs like 'We Are All Prostitutes' are all right, but once something is finished, that's that, and I'm on to making some other hybrid."

Stewart is obviously not a fan of his own juvenilia, feeling more comfortable in the future-present than the ever-present past. ("Can't we talk about bio-tech or something interesting?" he pleads). His current songs are more burnt out shells than wholesomely narrative, and his heavily shorn, if not downright bald, lyrics often as not share billing with samples and ripped and torn sound — snatches that scream out through the fractures and fissures of his and Sherwood's soundscapes. But his music can also be uncommonly lively. Check his relocations of Enk Sate's and Ryuchi Sakamoto's futuristic musics into the ruins of love hinted at in "Stranger Than Love" and "Forbidden Colour" (both on the 1987 album *Mark Stewart*).

Admittedly, love doesn't get that much of an airing in Stewart's songs, and when it does it's usually qualified with words like "forbidden." "People say that my songs are political, but I'm only saying this is what I see with my own eyes," he says. "I'm not so much taking a stance on things as saying this is interesting to me. The only reason most people say that, anyway, is because most lyrics only deal with two per cent of what's happening." □ *Control Data* is released this month by Mute (through RITMUSIC).

PHOTO: MICHELLE LEBLANC

data
crime boss



5189751



codes of practice

Iain Scott, head of the independent label Triple Earth, provides a DIY guide on how to bypass the corporate structures of the music industry by **starting your own record label**

As part of an independent record company, and for my sins, I sometimes listen to demo tapes. Without wishing to cry on your shoulder, it's not always easy. Good, bad or bizarre, the percentage that we can do anything with is microscopic. And it's not always the fault of the music; or indeed the artist whose life's work now crackles from our speakers. As often as not we haven't got the cash, it's not appropriate, we've got too much on, too little on — any excuse we can think of.

But once a rejection is in motion, and if the conversation has progressed beyond tears and explosives, then I'm almost invariably interrogated as to how much it might cost and how it might be done if, just if, the artist were to make the CDs themselves. At first I resent this. Why should I reveal what has taken us years of mistakes to find out? A slightly paranoid state of mind begins to emerge. The rejected artist might actually go ahead and do it, and then, horror of horrors, some six months later make a success of what we stupidly turned down.

My anxiety increases. Who needs a record company anyway? What's so secret about making a CD? Why shouldn't the artist form their own company? And what was once a gentle and sensitive 'Thanks but no thanks' is now an interrogation regarding why we do what we do. But the question is well asked. Who does need record companies? In an effort to atone for my sins, or perhaps just in the hope that I might be saved embarrassing encounters in the future, the following is a distorted do-it-yourself guide to the making and financing of a compact disc, at the time of writing the most popular sound carrier in the UK.

Glass bead game: mastering and manufacturing

So how much do CDs cost? Depending on what, where and how many you're manufacturing, together with the deal you manage to hustle, probably something around \$0.70 to \$0.90 per CD. All included sleeve insert, label, jewel case, the lot.

'Not bad' you think. 'Not bad, indeed,' I think. But not surprisingly, there's more. Before your disc can be manufactured (and skipping for the moment the potential costs and processes of how you might record the music and produce the artwork that will be immortalised on your CDs), a glass master — the physical master from which all discs are pressed — has to be made. It's a factory process and they will make a one-off charge of around £350, which can be avoided if, for example, your first order is big enough. Alternatively, go into bazaar bargaining mode and arrange a deal whereby the charge is credited at some later date. There are many factories, some as far away as Korea, and they all want your business.

Before this glass master lies the PQ Editing. This is a kind of indexing which provides the information necessary for a CD player to know when one track finishes and another begins. It's a studio process and is usually part of the mastering procedure (more of which below). Some CD pressing plants will offer this service at a reasonable fixed rate of around \$100. But as you can't be there when they do it, and mastering is the last time you meet with your tape before it gets turned into actual CDs, then it's probably best to enter the PQ points at the same time as you master.

Much myspace surrounds mastering. There was a time when every mastering studio had a single layer of Kleenex tissue hanging over the

front of the monitor speakers. These were not emergency supplies in case of an occupational-hazard nosebleed, but were put there because it was reputed to be the favourite trick of legendary mastering engineer Bob Ludwig. Only when the Kleenex was in place, so the story goes, thereby subtly altering the sound coming from the speakers, would Ludwig proceed with the mastering process.

Apocryphal (or not) stories aside, mastering studios are supremely practical places. Here is where the volume levels between the various tracks on a CD are rationalised, where cross-fades (fading down one track as another fades up beneath it) can be made, edits added, and, rather like a glorified domestic hi-fi system with its bass and treble controls, where the overall sound can be modified. However, it's worth bearing



in mind that while a good mastering engineer can make a great track sound even better, he or she can't make crap sound good.

You might also want to consider entering ISRC codes at this time, a marvelous invention presently used mainly by the majors, but why should they have all the fun? The idea is that each recorded track, or even version of that track, is allocated its own unique number. Rather like a sub-audio barcode, this is incorporated onto the master at the time of mastering. Thereafter, whatever happens to that track, whether it's broadcast on TV or radio, sent down a computer line, or included on a CD compilation in Brazil, it can be logged and a variety of information can be accessed.

This could easily replace human error with computer error, but if the future of music retail includes downloading music via the Internet then what better way to ensure that everything is accurately accounted? PPL (Phonographic Performance Ltd) are the UK agents for ISRC codes, but basically if you're the owner of a recording then you are assigned a First Owner Code and then a bunch of other numbers you make up yourself. You don't even have to be a member of PPL, and it's free.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said for good mastering studios. To master a CD will cost anything from £80 and a lot more per hour depending on what they're doing, plus you have to buy a digital U-Matic tape (which holds the PQ-edited music destined for your CD and from which your glass master is made) at £45 or thereabouts. Putting together an album will probably take a minimum of four hours and more likely a day if you've got any fancy stuff to do. It's not unknown for many thousands of pounds to be spent on mastering. It's also not unknown for a finished DAT master, hot from the studio, sequenced and edited to the artist's satisfaction, to be sent straight to the factory with everybody happy and nobody the wiser.

Add all this together, not forgetting the VAT, and you're still under £2 per CD. Not quite the pennies that newspaper editors got so excited about during Parliamentary investigations, but neither is it a serious threat to your recreational drugs account.

What could have gone wrong so far? Well, right disc, wrong music is one possibility. I'm pretty certain that there are still some 200 CDs of ours floating around, sold and never returned, that played underlined Western classical music (it sounded like Baroque to me) instead of the Gaic-Afro-Ethno-Ambient-Dance-Pop we'd all been promised. Nice cover, shame about the music.

Here's another painful but not uncommon scenario: you've got the release date, the tour's set up and there's a string of expectant journalists waiting at the door, hot for the latest sensation. Only problem is, you have no CDs. They're still at the factory, or rather the master tape is at the factory and they haven't quite got round to manufacturing it because they're too busy pressing *Now That's What I Call Music Vol 2058*. Sad but true. Factories get busy, particularly in the three months or so running up to Christmas. What was once a promised delivery time of 'ten working days' suddenly becomes 'tomorrow', 'next week', 'I'm sorry, but there's been a problem at the factory'.

Wrap it up: packaging

But I'm running ahead of myself. I must not forget the best way to lose friends and influence nobody. Last year, according to the 'weel' release lists published in the trade magazine *Music Week*, 12.8% of albums were released in the UK alone. Add in the 5948 singles officially notified to the same magazine and it's all a bit overwhelming. So, in this deluge, how do you get noticed?

I'd win no medals for marketing if I pointed out that good packaging design always helps, but that's only part of the story. For reasons that I can only guess at, there appears to be a covert but constant guerrilla war raging between graphic designers and printers. The body count is high, occasional raids are made from associated skills such as film makers (who are



able to switch sides at a moment's notice), and then just when you think it's all safe, computer error strikes. Nobody gets through unscathed and sometimes, just sometimes, it's your own fault.

Good designers are not cheap, or at least that's what they tell you. And in a way, they're right. But the corporate budget is not yours to play with, so you commission a friend of a friend to take the photographs, and another friend of a friend to design and lay out the sleeve and provide you with finished 'camera ready' artwork for the printer. Now you're in trouble.

All I can say is make sure that it is clear both what has been agreed and what you are paying for. Write it down, make an agreement. Not surprisingly, designers—even, perhaps especially, designers who are friends of friends—can get upset when they find the logo, album cover, CD label or whatever (all of which they designed and all of which you thought you owned) on T-shirts spread out in the local market, when as far as they were concerned it was only to be used for the original purpose of packaging a CD.

Similarly for photographs. Since the 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patent Act certain 'moral' rights have accrued to artists in whichever field they work. It's not always entirely clear what these rights are and as far as I'm aware they have not yet been fully tested in court, but they're there, and a practical result, for example, can be that some photographic printing laboratories will not print your publicity photographs unless they have a letter from the photographer authorising you to print an agreed and stated quantity.

With any luck, albeit after much angst, your designer will supply you with some form of a computer disc or cartridge upon which there is all the information needed for a repro house to make the films from which the sleeve will be finally printed (this printing will usually be done by the same factory that is pressing the CDs) it is the designer's responsibility to ensure the information is there but, for the avoidance of further stress, your responsibility to check that it actually is. How do you do this without being a computer literate designer yourself? Beyond me, so trust does play its part.

However, some tips are to be sure that accessible files for all fonts used in the text on the CD sleeve are present, and the same goes for any photographs or other images that have been scanned in, make sure you have remembered to put artist, title and catalogue information on both sides, and that the catalogue number is present on your booklet as well as the tray insert and the CD label. The list seems endless, but not impossible.

What else could have gone wrong so far? Don't ask. I have a personal obsession that no important information should appear in the top right hand corner of the cover as this is where Our Price put their price stickers in a similar vein, the artist's name should not appear along the bottom of the cover because nobody can see it when it's in a CD browser.

And don't forget a barcode. If your turnover is less than one million pounds per year (blush) then it will cost you about £70 per annum to join the Article Number Association (who license barcodes). They'll allocate you a basic number out of which, and by some completely arcane process, you calculate an individual product number. With luck your designer might have a computer programme which will automatically drop in this barcode for you. The ANA will even supply you with a chart of colours and dimensions which are not acceptable. This saves you from the embarrassment of seeing, insanely well, but not one barcode reader that logs their sale 'opens', and not just to the little people.

The cost of all this? I'd almost forgotten. How much you pay your designer is between you and the confession box, but for sake of argument I'll agree at £400 not including materials at £250, plus photographer, photographs and materials at £500, and the repro house (remember that? It's the place you take your finished artwork on a computer disc to) are going to charge a minimum of around £250. Add all this to the previous £2000 and we're up to £3645. Build in a ten per cent contingency and we're close to £4000.

All of a sudden, what was costing you less than a



quid per CD is now closer to four. And this is even before we get into recording costs, mechanical royalties, marketing budgets, the video or, God forbid, tour support: "100 per cent recoverable to you, mate." Of course it can be done more cheaply. It can also be done more expensively.

Studio kinda cloudy: the recording process

As regards recording and mixing, the variety of alternatives available, from your Atari-equipped bedroom, through back street basements via medium sized 'respectable' studios to tropical island fantasies, means that it is impossible to make any resounding commandments about the method and means. However, it's fair to say that, in all but the most extreme circumstances, whatever you spend on manufacturing and packaging you'll end up spending at least the same again on recording and mixing.

And how to get the best out of people? There are no rules, none that sound sane anyway and many that sound patronising. Try to avoid lusting after the lead vocalist. Grovel to the engineer before they accidentally hit the erase button. Book the studio, book the group, book the producer, lay some tracks and then at 3am on the first day decide you really don't want to do this because you know someone whose sister had an illegitimate child by Steve Wonder (allegedly), and maybe he can get you a better deal (this proposal actually happened). All this and more.

Makin' deals: the small print

The same goes for the recording deals, licence agreements, publishing assignments, whatever: the variety is so wide that generalisations are futile. However, whether you are the one making an offer, or the one receiving an offer, you should get legal advice from a solicitor or lawyer that specialises in music agreements. I'm still smarting from the time I was saved by a solicitor who specialised in music conveyancing, but for reasons that would have confused Solomon, was advising an artist on a recording deal. Nobody wins.

In the main, record companies pay for things, so they want to own them. And artists create things, so they want to own them — a conflict usually won by the record company. If you are being offered, or are offering, an exclusive recording deal with several options the record company will probably want the option on their side. This means the company can require the artist to make an album, the artist can't. Quite how the company forces the artist to make a good album is another matter.

There are sound reasons for all this, but then I'm biased. Perhaps it's best to cite the oft-quoted statistic that only one in eight signings ever break even, let alone go into profit. It was a profound shock when I realised the full implications of the fact that financing and making music is not like buying cans of beans, where, so long as you don't go past your sell-by date, they still have inherent value. From the perspective of a record company, there is no inherent value for music. As with all works of 'art', the value is whatever somebody is prepared to pay for it, and if nobody is prepared to pay for it, it is to be it, then it's worth nothing.

Back to the small things — like the (literally) small print, for example. A very simple but essential step is to make sure that the ownership of the publishing is clearly shown and easily read. It's a common assumption that the arcane rites of publishing are not for the uninitiated, and the way the industry is set up this sometimes seems true. However, what's important to keep in mind is that 'copyright' in the form of exclusive rights or ownership — can exist in two ways: one, the tangible recording of the music, and two, the intangible music that's on the recording. Publishing concerns the rights to that intangible music, whether recorded or not, and in the UK the Performing Rights Society (PRS) is an organisation concerned with collecting any monies due when that music is performed or broadcast.

PRS recently achieved infamy by losing between eight and 12 million pounds (depending on who you believe) of logged publishing royalties when a computer

system crashed. But don't let that worry you. Just make sure the phrase 'Music Published By...' appears on the CD itself, within the booklet, and probably on the tray insert. If you're the owner of, or control the rights to, a composition, and this composition is being played on the radio, for instance, then you want to make sure it's as easy as possible for a DJ to log that play so you, or more probably PRS on your behalf, can collect the money due.

As for the P and C in a circle followed by whoever owns the recording and a date stick them on regardless. Different people say different things, that the P refers to the publishing and the C to the recording, or that the P refers to the copyright in the recording and the C refers to the copyright in the artwork, or, my personal choice, that they both concern the copyright in the recording but each refers to a different international agreement. Either way nobody asks any questions and you've done your job.

The same applies to the words that generally go around the edge of the disc and begin 'All Rights of the Producer and the Owner'. The Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS) will supply you with the current and recommended wording. Which brings us neatly or otherwise to mechanical royalties.

Paid in full: mechanical royalties

If popular mythology casts record companies in the role of evil, grasping, cigar-smoking, coke-snorting corporate car-dealers then music publishers are their silent Svengalis. None of this is true (he said), but explaining all the ramifications of copyright in musical works, as opposed to the copyright in recordings of those works, has defeated even the clearest of thinkers. But 'mechanicals' are simple. They are the royalties that the owner of a recording has to pay the owner of a composition for the privilege of recording and releasing that composition. For albums released in the UK, that royalty is set at 8.5 per cent of the Published Dealer

Price, ie the price to the shop. There are other formulas, but that's the most common.

One way or another, these have to be paid. Otherwise you can be prosecuted. Radically, you inform MCPS (who are responsible for collecting mechanical royalties on behalf of artists) of what, where and how many CDs you want to manufacture together with the price per unit you intend to charge shops. Assuming that all goes well, MCPS will inform the factory send you a licence to manufacture together with an invoice for 8.5 per cent of the total less an allowance for promotional purpose. Majors get to pay on sales alone, but you're not so lucky.

What more could have gone wrong? Everything.

However, strangely, it rarely does. It used to be automatic that if a song was already recorded and released then, subject to you paying mechanical royalties, you could also record and release a cover version and nothing more was said. Now, permission has to be sought. Generally MCPS will do that for you, but as the rate you have to pay is set in law, it is rare for the owner to refuse.

So now you've got your CDs, and I've lost count of how much it costs. All you need to do now is sell them, and there I can't, or won't help you. It's an old phrase, but very apt: 'Do turkeys vote for Christmas?' As a record company, we'll probably go squawking to the dinner table and, as the gravy drips, protest that we have a useful, meaningful, vital life. But do you really need us? As my tongue is in my cheek. No.

some contacts

Article Number Association (ANA) 11 Kingsway, London WC2B 6AR Tel: 0171 240 2912
Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS) Elgar House, 41 Streamham High Road, London SW16 1ER Tel: 0181 664 4400
Phonographic Performance Ltd (PPL) Ganton House, 14-22 Ganton Street, London W1V 1LB Tel: 0171 437 0311
Performing Rights Society (PRS) 29-33 Berners Street, London W1P 4AA Tel: 0171 580 5544
Musicians Union 60-62 Clapham Road, London SW9 0JJ Tel: 0171 582 5566





invisible jukebox

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of . . .

Courtney Pine

Tested by Mike Barnes

Born in London in 1964, saxophonist Courtney Pine first came to prominence as the face of 'New British Jazz' in the mid-80s. His 1986 debut album *Journey To The Lige Within* was the first 'serious' jazz album to make the British Top 40, notching up enough sales to qualify for a silver disc. This success followed teenage years spent playing funk and reggae sessions, as well as with his own hard top group Dwarf Steps, and John Stevens's Freebop. In 1984 Pine formed Abba Jazz Arts to promote interest in jazz among young British black musicians. This eventually spawned The Jazz Warriors big band in 1985, whose members included Steve Williamson and Cleveland Watkiss. Since then, Pine has played with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Evin Jones and in Charlie Watts's Big Band. He has also worked closely with Soul II Soul, The Pet Shop Boys and as part of the jazz/HipHop project Jazzmatazz (inspired by Gang Starr's *Guns*). With time, Pine's own music has become increasingly broad in scope. 1990 saw the release of an instrumental reggae album *Closer To Home*, while 1992's *To The Eyes Of Creation* combined jazz with mysticism, ska, African and Asian influences. After touring with Jazzmatazz in 1995, Pine has incorporated techniques borrowed from HipHop into his music more and more: the process can be heard on the recently released *Modern Day Jazz Stories*, his first record in four years. The jukebox took place at Pine's North London home.

ALICE COLTRANE "Something About John Coltrane" from *Journey In Satchidananda* (Impulse)

It's [John] Coltrane's "Greensteves" bassline, but it's later. The bells remind me of Pharoah Sanders. It's like "Greensteves" exactly, the arrangement, without Coltrane so far. The piano player's record?

Yes.

Not Stanley Cowell or something like that? It's quite spiritual, and the bells make it sound like something from the 70s. It's definitely not McCoy Tyner. Who is it?

Alice Coltrane.

[Bursts out laughing] Oh, man! I know this record so well. I like the album, especially the first [title] track. Wow.

We thought it would be a bit obvious to play you an actual John Coltrane track. Until Pharoah came in, that would have been a mystery. It's interesting hearing the record without Coltrane. It's all around him — it's as if he's there but not there. Same sound. He'd be playing it exactly this way if he were there. I like the way she uses the tamboura in the background. She got into the more feminine elements of the music, adding

those kind of sounds, the lighter sounds, the harp. Obviously John was trying to get more involved in that kind of thing, but he was still into the machismo, playing the saxophone at light speed. But with her you're getting a whole different thing, there's something slightly lighter, more feminine, to the whole thing. **The tamboura is used in an unusual context here, but works really well.** Very well. His music was so open you could almost use anything in there.

There was one review of a gig where he had three saxophone players and he was playing bagpipes. But then he had two drummers and the reviewer said you couldn't hear the bagpipes, so he didn't know if he sounded good or not! That's the nature of his music, it was so wide that almost anything could be brought in and dealt with.

He didn't bring anything electric in though, he stayed very much away. There was an instrument called the vantage, it's a saxophone that plays an octave above and below. Sonny Satt used to play a lot of it. He [Coltrane] had one, but he didn't record with it. He was very wary of using electronic stuff in his music. Everything was more acoustic and natural.

JACOB'S OPTICAL

STAIRWAY

"Fragments of A Lost Language" from Jacob's Optical Stairway (R&S)

The intro could have been done in the 70s. There's so many similarities in the tone, but when the drums come in it gives it away. I don't know who it is. It's not 4 Hero? It's that [Fender] Rhodes sound. They use the exact same sound on [their remix of] my tune "We Know Rivers".

It is 4 Hero, but recording under the name Jacob's Optical Stairway.

The problem when you're involved in anything happening now, it's hard for it to have identity, because we know it as Caffe. So for me to say that's A Guy Called Gerald or that's Goldie — I've got Gerald's album and I've got Goldie's albums, so I might know bits of that. But the rest of it — especially when they're going under pseudonyms and using the same bits of equipment to make sounds — it's very hard. It's only that Rhodes sound that's very similar.

I like the idea of it being faceless as well, not having a focal point, a front person. 4 Hero have just sent me a mix of something which is totally out, totally different to any of this. So they're able to flex on either side [Bassline comes in]. There's a Fender Precision bass sound. What do you think musicians like Steve Williamson — or even yourself — working with the likes of Metalheadz or 4 Hero? Do you think it's a vital contribution to the music, or more an appropriation by the Junglists of jazz as a kind of cool surface texture?

It's hard, because the next generation to come along [will be] the ones who study Charlie Parker and programming at the same time. My generation are [points hand] that way in studying a jazz tradition and only 40 per cent in terms of programming. So I have to call somebody who knows what they're doing in terms of Jungle, and can do it — but I want to be in there, I want to be able to play, because I can hear how I would play on this. I would play differently on this than I would do on a jazz track or any other pop session. This has got so much variety and space for me to do whatever I want to.

It must be a challenge to play in a completely new musical genre.

I actually play "Rivers" live now in the set, and I remember two years ago saying to the drummer in the reggae band, "I want you to play Jungle." He said, "What do I

do? I can't play it!" But now it's a situation 'Here it is, you have to do it, there's no choice, we're going to play it now.' And I can find my current drummer actually finding a style around it.

I have a friend who is a session drummer and he's trying to play Jungle manually. He uses three snare drums and two hi-hats and says he's almost there, but not quite.

The way I'm trying to do it is work with the record, with the DJs and the programming and after a while I'm going to take out the programming and just have the band playing. So we're learning to play it from the record like jazz musicians do, sit down and learn how to play the solo. If you can learn how to do Jungle on stage, then take away the record and just leave the band playing on the same level, you'll hopefully get it that way. You look at the drummer and think, "Oh, poor geezer."

My nephew came over at Christmas and they're 15 and played some stuff which was ridiculous, 180 bpm — it was so out. And that's why I like Jungle, because it breaks the rules. I've been trained in this classical sense that this is nothing to do with that. It's like people in the Senses hearing stuff coming through the walls and then can nose outside and somebody shouting in the street. It's all that condensed onto vinyl or CD. If you were an alien and came down and looked at it, that's what it would sound like, and that's what these guys have unconsciously done. That's what music is supposed to do, reflect the sound of the period, and these are the first guys to actually do it for now.

SPONTANEOUS MUSIC ENSEMBLE

"Tape Delight" from A New Distance (ACTA)

First of all you're searching for the shape of the instrument — what is he playing? OK, we've got the hi-hat. Is this soprano saxophone? Yes it is, I think. Then you start looking for the style of playing, and the great thing about this approach to music is that you take yourself away from any style, even though to play free is a style. You're defacing yourself.

Which perhaps makes it more difficult to figure out who's playing.

Yeah, but that's what Jungle and free jazz have in common. Elements of taking an instrument and doing things that the instrument's not supposed to do. The thing about free jazz is that it's now a style, a style from a period of time. As to

when it's recorded, I couldn't tell you. It was recorded in 94.

It's not Evan [Parker] P [Lud] [Cosh] P. Spontaneous Music Ensemble with John Stevens.

I was going to say John because he has a strong way of playing and leading, and the whole thing started with drums. It did sound British. John had a way of saying, "Get as close as dammit," you know, get up there and play. And he had a really nice attitude, because he was into playing music for anybody. Anybody could actually take part in it. He wanted to get music onto that level.

You played with Stevens.

A long time ago. Various things. He used to do a residency at The Ploagh in Stockwell and he invited me down a couple of nights to play. Those were interesting. Those were nice for me, because it got me to know what it is to get onstage and play. When I played what I practised, he used to say, "Forget all that, just play what you feel, stop practising on stage." And he was the first to give me an opportunity to play in that kind of setting, to take a chance.

He was someone from the 60s and 70s who seemed active in bridging the gap between that era and the resurgence of British jazz in the 80s.

Oh, definitely, definitely, because he was doing those workshops during the day. He had this concept called "Search and Reflect" — my wife saw an advert in the press and I went along and it was John Stevens. This was perfect for me because I was in Reggae World doing sessions and all that, but here was someone who played jazz who wasn't going to say, "You haven't played 'Cherokee' yet, so you can't play with me." [He said] "Just come and play, man." That was John. He was into capturing a moment, just dealing with it and that was it. Songs would have no beginning and ending. There were times when we'd play and he'd have some structured things and after that he'd just go. It was really interesting for me to see that, because here was this English jazz legend, as far as I could see he'd seen it, done it, conquered it.

He had the band leader attribute to bring out the best in his players. He could see that I was going a certain way, so he'd sit down and talk about seeing John Coltrane playing in Germany and Elvin [Jones] came out hammering the drums into the floor. And then he would say, "Let's play 'Bye Bye Blackbird' tonight."

So he had that way of tapping into what you had and forwarding it. Just put you in that he would just go off and but pull you in with him. So he had that positive band leader thing in terms of bringing players in and finding out exactly where they are and then pushing it and directing it in the way that you want them to be. He wanted me to play free and not come on stage practising what I'd been playing during the day. He had that ability to nurture musicians. Rather than being safe all the time, it's a challenge, and when you come out of that challenge, you're a different person.

The last thing I heard about John was that he was in the studio doing a Hipnotic version of a song, so I'm sure he'd be involved with Jungle in some way or another.

BOOTSY'S RUBBER BAND

"Bootsy Get Live" from This Boot Is Made For Funk (Warner Brothers) George Duke? Oh, hang on it's [mimes sip-bass playing] Bootsy Collins. It sounded like Zappa in the first couple of bars but it's out there, funky like George Duke's albums. But as soon as the vocals came in and the bassline

I spoke to someone who saw Bootsy live, and apparently when he spoke to the audience it was in the same tremendous voice that he sings in.

[Laughs] This is how he is for real? I met his tailor in Germany, a young lady, she just came up to me, maybe because I've got an afro, I don't know why. She gave me a card and said I must come and pay her a visit.

[Funkadelic's] one Nation Under A Groove, that whole sound in terms of being bass heavy, did a lot to affect the Jungle scene. You've got the same elements in the Parliament thing, there were lots of things happening at the same time — it was so layered. Dennis Chambers said they were crazy, there were so many things happening at the same time.

What kind of music were you listening to when you were growing up?

I didn't listen to [Bootsy] that much. I was more into guys who were playing from a [jazz] tradition and then coming forward. If this was Stanley Clarke [I'd say yeah, because Stanley Clarke came from Pharoah Sanders's band, but Bootsy, I would listen to it, but not in the same context. I wouldn't take it any less seriously but I don't have any Bootsy

records in my collection, though I do have the Parliament stuff.

[Looks at sleeve] Bernie Worrell, of course. Maaco [Parker] and Fred Wesley. Every HipHop record sounds like them on horns. And they weren't playing to dick tracks in these days. It's so tight from start to finish, no loops or anything

JOE HARRIOTT

"Beams" from Movement (Columbia) Unmistakable British 60s studio sound [Laughs] You think of that guy who does *Record Breakers*, Ray Castle, those *Dracula* films, Pinkwood Studios [After a minute of the track] Whee, what a mood change. He was bad, y'know, my man on the sax there. It's gone now, don't say it. He started off playing this way, then he pulls you into another way.

The Jazz Warriors did a tribute to him, Joe Harriott. There's been lots of talk about who actually started freeform jazz. He claims that he started it, then Ornette [Coleman] heard him and took it back to America. I've read reviews — because I've been studying this guy quite a bit — and he said he started doing it in 58, which would make his Stones kind of true. But because he wasn't able to get out of the country that much and play the kind of stuff, it was hard for anyone to actually date it — and this stuff is dated.

The trumpet player [Shake Keane] is in Canada, he's still around. Coleridge Goode [bass player] is still around, he plays in East London. He mentored the first pickup — he's an electrician — but he didn't patent it at the time.

Was Harriott an influence?

Well, he played alto and I don't really play alto, but the fact that he tapped so much into Charlie Parker, I was able to relate to how it was diffused into Joe Harriott. I was influenced more by his political thing, in terms of how he was able to get by as a Jamaican/European how did he get by? How did he get through the system? How did he get his records released? Obviously we have similarities, but I've got to learn from his experience. So he's an influence that way as opposed to trying to play like him. But he was a great player and a composer. You have to check out the *Indo-Jazz Fusion* [album], because that is incredible

GANG STARR

"Step Into The Arena" from Step Into The Arena (Cooltempo)

This relates to what you were saying earlier.

Yeah, because of Maaco, that sound is so tight. Guru and these guys, they've got to pick it up. And even that [high pitched sample] is a saxophone. It's like an evolution: you get that kind of sound, which is a bit of a saxophone solo, but looped and put in a different pitch so it doesn't sound like a saxophone. It may even be reversed. And now you've got to the point where you listen to a Jungle record and it's all like that, that's all you're hearing, as opposed to it being a little hook-line in a song. So we're getting more and more hardcore, more extreme in terms of the sound, the way we were altering the sound. With Jungle, it's gone so far that it's very difficult to decipher a record.

I went on the road with [Guru] in the Jazzmatazz thing and it was really funny because I had been on the road with Clint Eastwood and General Sam in the early 60s, and there were things that were going on in Jazzmatazz which were exactly the same as with Eastwood and Sam. Frontman, doing this, back to the rock 'n' roll, and also two DJs and a rapper. It was the same thing but a couple of years later and with a different accent.

HipHop producers have been sampling jazz for years, but the way that you play it, the HipHop elements are used as a background texture, with the jazz element out front.

That's come from listening to all this kind of stuff and seeing it being done the way then thinking there must be another way. It was a conscious decision to try to from the other side, see how it works. But you have to have people with the right skills from the HipHop field, because jazz people don't know about HipHop. It might not have worked, the HipHop people might have been submerged in the jazz, but it's a matter of getting the right people who are strong enough on their instrument to play as hard as we do. I'm lucky enough to have met two individuals who are from the UK who believe in HipHop — that's Sparky and Pogo. Just as much as I've studied in jazz, they've studied HipHop.

HipHop comes from the whole sound system thing and over here we have a big culture in sound systems with [Jah] Shaka and all that, and they're able to have a more open opinion of what they're supposed to do than people from the States. When I say sound systems, they know what I'm talking

about, but when I did the Jazzmatazz tour, I tried to get on that level with the DJ and it didn't work, he doesn't come from that kind of culture. There were two DJs [on the Jazzmatazz tour], Jazzy Nice and a guy called DJ Ski, and they're HipHop DJs. Nice is a bit more into the jazz thing but it's a different thing, they have a different way of looking at the music in terms of all the things that we want to do at one time. And the HipHop thing is just a part of it, but to them this is it, these are the rules. A lot of the Jamaicans were in New York and that's where they got it from, the whole toasting thing was Jamaican. So those parallels are very obvious. My parents are Jamaican and I was brought up here. I want to bring those parallels to light because there's something in it for me. Its important to me to know this knowledge of self. It makes me feel better about myself that my culture has influenced the rest of the world.

TOMMY MCCOOK & THE SUPERNOVES

"Music Is My Occupation" from Down On Bond Street (Trojan)

[Instantly] Now you're talking, the house has come alive, this is what the house is used to. [Laughs] Whee! Probably Ernest Ranglin on guitar. Is it Don Drummond playing trombone? And it's either Roland Alfonso or Tommy McCook [on sax].

Tommy McCook.

I had the opportunity to be in a cab with Alfonso in Jamaica. We did a sax festival and I was in the band. And in between checking into the hotels, we were sitting in the taxi and it was the first time we had the opportunity to talk. He liked my playing and he came straight to the point. Tommy McCook wasn't really into sax. He's a jazz man from Cuba and he went away, and it wasn't until he came back and saw [sax] being successful that he came and joined it. But they were jazz musicians. They were playing jazz in hotels for tourists, then went into the studio with Coxsone or whatever and did this kind of stuff, which were instrumental tracks for vocalists. Then what happened was the singers became famous and the musicians who created the music became session guys. For hire. He's playing "The Nearness Of You" [Sings along] I played it today. [Laughs] **What was it like when you were doing reggae sessions?** I was going to school in the morning, I was a school monitor, and I was out at

Brighton Top Rank, or Bradford, until two o'clock and they were saying, "Play this and that." You'd get Tappa Zukie shouting out, "This song is da-da-da." The songs didn't have titles, they were known as rhythm tracks, and they're all got some kind of unusual name for each rhythm, and then they sing whatever they want over the top of it. You'd have to know the horn lines by the name of the rhythm track, and you'd just have to learn quick. It was fun, you know. I was learning so much. A lot of those singers don't know what a key is, so it doesn't matter what tune the bass player plays as long as there's a drum pattern. Forget about the chords and the bridges, just have a drum pattern.

Iland have just signed Buju [Banton] and they're doing a lot with him, trying to conform him to pop in terms of having some kind of Western-oriented thing. But in Jamaica you can't just have a drum track and some guy talking about the weather and that's good enough for the territory.

DAVID S WARE

"Solar Passage" from Cryptology (Homestead)

Whee! [Sings along to the sax line] I have this record. It's an opposite thing [to the SME track]. That was minimalist. He's trying to cram everything in, as much as you can. I love this. Yeah. **It's a strange mix. Every other instrument is struggling to be heard with the sax blasting over everything.**

It's the feeling of reaching for something, that's what I like about this music. It's trying to get somewhere. It's trying to create something out of fire. It's David Ware. I'd like to do a record with him, James Carter and myself and just go for it, the three of us. Because David's more from 70s free jazz. I think I'm more from 80s free jazz — if you really check out where I came from, that's where I started as a free jazz player, and James Carter's from 90s free jazz, the Art Ensemble kind of thing. If all three of us got together, that would be a race clash. David Ware, and also Charles Gayle, seems dedicated to keeping the spirit of free jazz alive — "trying to create something out of fire," as you said. Yeah, there's nobody really going the way apart from Evan, Lol, David Ware and Gale, and Peter Brotzmann in Germany, a handful of guys who're still pursuing that spirit.

Continued on page 66



OUT NOW ON Black Arc



MUTINY - Aftershock 2005 (Rykodisc RCD 10334)

A big bad funk album from former Chambers Brothers and P-Funk drummer Jerome "Bigfoot" Briley with a revamped lineup of his original Parliament offshoot band Mutiny. Featuring Bernie Worrell, Bill Laswell, Nicky Skopchills, OXT and more.



ABIODUN OYEWOLE - 25 Years (Rykodisc RCD 10335)

Last Poet Abiodun Oyewole for his first solo album threads his crucial song/poetry through an assortment of world music fabrics laid down by Bill Laswell, including a remake of the Last Poets classic 'When The Revolution Comes'. With contributions from Umar Bin Hassan, Don Babatundé, Ayib Dieng and more.



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Umar Bin Hassan and Abiodun Oyewole, the Last Poets: the forefathers of rap and hip-hop. Holy terror is their blazing return to the scene. THE LAST POETS ON TOUR - March 30th Brighton Odeon, March 31st London Jazz Cafe



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6 CD BOXSET - LIMITED EDITION 3 ALBUM VINYL SET

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charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

On The Wire 15

Big Ass Truck — Big Ass Truck (Upstart)
The Disciples — For Those Who Understand (Boomshackalack)
Jim Sherman — Raw Acoustic Soul (Mantra pre-release)
DJ Vadim — Non-Lateral Hypothesis (Ninja Tune)
The Congos — Heart Of The Congos (Blood & Fire)
Dub Syndicate — Ital Breakfast (On-U Sound)
Various — Dubhead Vol 2 (Shiver)
Dom Um Romao — Saudades (Waterlily Acoustics)
Various — Batucada Sound Of The Favelas (Mr Bongo)
Ed Rush — West Side Sax (No U-Turn)
John Coltrane — Stellar Regions (Impulse!)
Alpha & Omega — Sound System Dub (ROIR)
Various — Travelling Through The Jungle (Testament)
Third Eye Foundation — Semtex (13)
Mark Stewart — Data Control (Mute)
Compiled by Steve Barker. On The Wire, BBC Radio Lancashire, Sundays 12.05-2am

15 Incredibly Strange Records

The Mobile Suit Corporation — Tokyo Mobile Music 1 (Phonogram)
Jean Jacques Perrey/Gershon Kingsley — The In Sound From Way Out (Vanguard)
Beaver & Krause — Nonesuch Guide To Electronic Music (Nonesuch)
Ray Davies & His Funky Trumpet — Best Of Button Down Brass (Fontana)
Danield Peel & The Lower East Side — Have A Marijuela (Elektra)
Various — Cockney As It Is Spoken (Saga)
RD Laing — Life Before Death (Charisma)
Various Sound FX — Chilling, Thrilling Sounds Of The Haunted House (Disneyland Records)
Various — Kung Fu OST From The TV Series (Warner Bros)
Various — Children Talking: Soundtrack From The TV Series (MFP)
Dr Daniels — Dr Daniels Explains A-Z For Kids (US Carpan Records)
Various — Dada For Now: A Collection Of Futurist And Dada Sound Works (Ark Records)
Peter Wyngarde — Peter Wyngarde (RCA)
Various — Pathway To The Mind (Meditation Exercises) (Major Minors)
Various Ladies — Voices From Woman's Hour (BBC Records)
Compiled by Sonnie Quintan, The Garden Of Earthly Delights, Radio CRK, Fridays 11pm-1am

Jim Sherman

Non-Axiomatic 10

Anthony Manning — Chroma Nebulae (Indisi)
Various — Folds And Rhizomes (Sub Rosa)
Tom Jenkinson — Peace Nail (Dragon Disc)
Fennesz — Instrument (Piegal)
Fangstayer — Ultra Blue (Drive-In)
Witchman — The Shove Of Rage (Leaf)
Jean Shirt — New From Jean Shirt (DAT)
Dijecta — Clean Pt And Did (Warp)
Berni Friedman — Leisure Jones (Art)
Active On Earth — Music Tracks (Jah-sonic)
Compiled by Jeremy Potter, Non-Axiomatic, Live Sheffield ProFM 106.8 PM Sundays mid-11pm

In Vivo 15

Various — Shakti (MCA)
Rick Harris/Bill Laswell — Symbiotic Warfare
Ryoji Ikeda — 1000 Fragments (Nonesuch)
Muslingpauze — Bandit Queen (P Records)
Coil — Blacklight District (Esoteric)
Germ — Error (GPR)
Disinformation — Ghost Shells A/N (Klanggarden)
Dandy Jack — Dandy Jack (Rother: Information)
G-Man — G-Man 2 (SW)
Various — Serenity Dub 1-4 (1. Innomini)
PSP Lancaster — Star Pie (V Recordings)
Various — Collaborations 1 (Records)
Tek 9 — Old Time (Various)
LFO — Advance (Warp)
David Toop — Screen Ceremonies (The Wire Editors)
Compiled by Philip Suckling, In Vivo, Radio 4, 11pm

The Office Ambience

Rhys Chetham & Martin Wheeler — Neoch (N'Tone)
Dom & Roland — Dynamics/The Planets (Moving Shadow)

Ravi Shankar — The Collection (EMI Classics)
David S Ware — Dug (Hemstead)
Patrick Pulsinger — Pomo (Disko B Records)
General Sublim — Danger In Paradise (Piano)
The Pop Group — Y (Eassey)
Various — Various (From NineGar)
Nearly God — Nearly God (Island)
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan — Night Song (Real World)
EAR — Beyond The Pale (Big Cat)
Opini — Offspeed And In There (Trance Syndicate)
Turbote — Day (UNKLE Remod) (City Slang)
Optical 8 — All Over (God Mountain)
DJ Spooky — Songs Of A Dead Dreamer (Asphodel)
Compiled by The Wire Sound System

Yet More Dodgy Group Names

Terminal Office
Elvis Vulva Land
Genital Panic
Spud Burger
The Hong Men
Anal Biscuits
Pork Rind
Lard
Concrete Lovers
All group names compiled by Ang L Polo

sound check

Under the hammer: April's selected CDs and albums

In this month's review section:

Aksak Mabouli • Artcore 2
Bandulu • Franco Battiato
Blue Cheer • Glenn Branca
Cocteau Twins • Coil
Ornette Coleman
Descension • DJ Spooky
Dub Syndicate • Alec Empire
EAR • Everything Is Slow!
Fukkeduk • Güles/Muñ
Cunningham • Egberto
Gismonti • Jimmy Guiffre
Goubert/Vander • Keiji
Haino • Bernard Herrmann
HIM • *History Of Space Age*
Pop • Dave Holland • Anna
Homler • Paul Jorgensen
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan • &
Michael Brook • King Sunny
Ade • LA1919 • Joe Maneri
Colin Matthews • *Mendham*
Crossings • Money Mark
Michael Morley • Katherine
Norman • *Nu Skool Flava*
Offbeat • p53 • Harry Partch
The Pop Group • Martin Rev
Rumpus Room • Yandé
Codou Sène & Youssou
N'Dour • Spacer • Jamaladeen
Tacuma • Masahiko Togashi
Erikla-Sven Tüür • David S
Ware • Randy Weston
Cassandra Wilson • Neil
Young • John Zorn **plus**
critical beats, out rock
and new classical
releases in brief

Franco Battiato

Shadow, Light
EMI/HEMPHRE COEC 3743 CD

Longtime crossover freak Battiato—a kind of Euro John Zorn before the event, seems a curious choice to represent Italy for EMI's excellent Hemisphere series, particularly as this somewhat bloodless homage to Holy Minimalism seems to have little to do with the aesthetics of Battiato or his homeland.

Franco's Mediterranean croon sounds agreeably borne when cooed over a syrup of Frank Chacksfield strings gone Gregorian—a bit like Zucchero vocalising over Barber's Adagio. But his ascents and descents through the modes sound a bit too pat, particularly in his not terribly affecting (or rather too affected) Mass setting (the melodies of the "Sanctus" and "Agnus Dei" have "left-field hit" written all over them). Has this genre now become another *SoHo* playground, blurring faith, authenticity and commercialism? Battiato thinks so—there are New Age synth adumbrations hidden somewhere (though none too subtly) in the string textures to sweeten the pill still further.

Battiato's use of Middle Eastern vocal and melodic techniques over this backcloth in "Haku" revives his penchant for cross-cultural jokes (the piece obviously has bigger-all to chew with Japan). And on "Ricerca Sud Terzo" saudeiro bongos, tablas and non-professional chorus (honest) prise open the door to Battiato's real gifts a little further. Perhaps the whole album's a joke—but surely too expensive for Battiato (orchestras, choruses and soloists don't come cheap), or any self-respecting listener, to be worth taking seriously.

PAUL STUPP

Blue Cheer

Love & Unreleased 68/74
CAPTAIN TRIP-CTCD 023 CD

In its original incarnation, Blue Cheer was a trio of outsiders who had turned their backs on the late 60s San Francisco scene and its hordes of beautiful people in order to construct a form of music that was brutal, exhilarating and rooted hard. Spiked with lycerag vision (blue cheer being a particularly powerful strain of LSD), the group—bass guitarist Dick Peterson,



guitarist Leigh Stephens and drummer Paul Whaley—became regulars at local haunts like the Avalon Ballroom and eventually became house band at the club run by the San Francisco chapter of the Hell's Angels, where they once shared a stage with Janis Joplin and Big Brother And The Holding Company. On another legendary night, a dog ambled onstage during a Blue Cheer set and dropped dead of shock due to the piercing jet engine scream of feedback spewing from the group's towering speaker system.

Blue Cheer were Heavy Metal long before the term was touted by Led Zeppelin, and their career, although fraught with numerous changes of lineup and direction, has remained a

constant source of inspiration for up and coming hard rock groups. 80s Sub Pop heroes such as Green River and Nirvana, and the new breed of 90s Japanese psychedelic groups—Fushitsusha, Musica Transonic, High Rise, who have effectively manipulated the trio's primal rage and warped musical invention into their own extended power drones.

All of which would have undoubtedly mystified talk show host Steve Allen when he introduced the group on his show way back in 1968 (the results can be heard on the first three tracks of this expensive release). For Allen, the group must have seemed like another ugly, hairy trio of teenage layabouts who just might boost his ratings and allow him to bathe briefly in an afterglow of hipster glory.

In 1968 Blue Cheer had signed to Philips, and their debut album *Wincest Eruption* was being heavily played by the company. The trio's pre-Who version of Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" had been pushed as a potential hit single and maybe it was this that attracted Allen.

The extracts from that long buried episode in TV rock history remain priceless. Allen introduces the group with a codicure, patronising, self-consciously hip monologue that sounds even more hilarious once the trio pile into a ferocious version of "Summertime Blues" that burrs with feedback, static and bad attitude.

"The Blue Cheer... Run for your life!" is how Allen nervously introduces the trio's second song "Out Of Focus." The third song receives no introduction at all, but "Doctor Please" is an astonishing example of Blue Cheer at their most creative, with a Leigh Stephens guitar solo that unearths and intensifies endlessly over Peterson and Whaley's rudimentary backing. Here are the roots

soundcheck

of White Heaven's magnificent Qur album, as well as Musica Transcend bass player Nargo Aschto's more explosive sound bursts. A magnificent document.

The remainder of the CD is less impressive (an unreleased [and no wonder!] Kim Fowley studio session from 1974 which muffles the awesome power of the original trio inside one of Fowley's throwaway bubblegum creations. Only Peterson survives from the first Blue Cheer line-up, and the result is a set of songs that wouldn't even have caused Steve Allen to arch an eyebrow. However, the fabulous rock 'n' roll animal that was Blue Cheer can be heard roaring on the first three tracks of this CD — a group that were justifiably described as being "louder than God." Amen to that.

EDWIN POUNCEY

Glenn Branca

Symphony No. 9 (Le Vie Future)

POINT 446 503 CD

Le Vie Future is a title with some resonance. It's taken from the Comte de Villiers de Isle-Adam's 1896 Symbolist fantasy, in which Thomas Alva Edison himself invents an artificial woman and equips her with an internal phonograph, programming her with the literary works of the ages so that his thum, the decadent English aristocrat Lord Ewald, may have himself a mate he can also talk to. Clearly not exactly Mr PC.

I'd like to continue liking Branca, in spite of everything. If he's a charlatan — a punk rock actor dancing and gesticulating in way through the stately role of conductor-composer — then he's also the Prince of Geekiness, and how can we not approve that? And if he's not a charlatan — those fleeting, high-volume acoustic effects in his symphonies-of-a-thousand-guitars are something he genuinely knows how to summon and manipulate — well, that's real technical discovery, whatever the interim outcome. Better the new-but-naughty than John Adams, surely.

But even this guitar thing only really works in the right hall, when Branca has control of the amps and where you can watch him prancing around. On record, what he calls the "magic in jar" seems quickly to evaporate. (It's a problem for many off-mainstream minimalists. Phil Niblock is a God in his own Christown



Bandulu
Cornerstone

BLANCO Y NEGRO 0630 13547 CDLP

For the last three or four years, London's Bandulu have been slyly extending Techno's tonal range by infusing its digital low end with smooth doses of warm herbal bass. Cornerstone, their third LP, comes almost two years after 1994's *Animatronics*, but the opening tracks "Selah" and "Running Time" take up pretty much exactly where that set left off, fusing dub and Techno so closely that you can't see the join. "Selah" is languid dreg-dub, populated by lazy buzzes moving in circles like sun-drunk insects, while woodblocks and shakers chime in counterpoint to a heavy, syncopated kickdrum. "Running Time" takes the same mood and ups the bpm's, carrying fat, overdriven bass pulses along on a peppy stream of latex 4/4 beats.

So far, so good — smooth, deep and immaculate beryl Techno seems to be the order of the day. But Bandulu change the channel for "Parasite", and from that point on Cornerstone takes on an intriguing alternative identity. The track titles ("Trinity", "Protocols", "Jester") begin to sound like '70s episodes of *Dr Who*, and the timbre shifts subtly into alien territory. There are abstract digital sound loops, reminiscent of Ken Ishi or even a heavily reverbed Morlon Subotnik, unsteady drone clusters scattered across the stereo spectrum, and unspecified subterranean crashes. On "Trinity" the tight mesh of Radiophonic chords and busy little shivers and squeals breaks down suddenly, leaving a passage of forbidding videodrome ambience shot through with wooed mutterings. As the record goes on, it becomes apparent that the structuring principle of Cornerstone is not melody, nor even rhythm, but endless, restless textural evolution. The overall effect, despite the frequently jumpy kickdrums and enviously crisp hi-hats, is of a music that is moving tantalisingly away from the listener, which makes Cornerstone a more interesting LP than it initially appears to be.

CHRIS SHARP

(left: on CD something's always lacking) And with Branca's Ninth Symphony, there's a further retreat from his signature innovation: those clanging aë-larries are exchanged for a "proper orchestra" plus choir. If amazing acoustic phenomena are the point, you can't make them out on your stereo.

It isn't as if the standard classical orchestra is utterly played out as a

nose-generator, just that the form and/or technique needed to wrest new nose from it has become rebarbaric in the extreme (and classical players mostly can't be paid enough to go along with either). Easier to opt for clever replications in the concert hall of established non-orchestral effects. Hence that most common of devices among "rock" composers: blocks of

orchestral harmony moved as if they were Sex Pistols guitar bar-chords (which may be why this occasionally resembles David Byrne's *The Forest*, which I think I alone liked, and also why it put me in mind of Youth and Jaz Coleman's *Us And Them* *Symphonic*. Pink Floyd, at which even I had to draw a reluctant line).

A technical term for the overall problem might be "effects at the expense of form": the context all too reassuring, in order to deliver a handful of striking novelty passages (it's a peril mainstream minimalism is also heir to). It may not be fair, but once you happen on Branca out of the ether, conflicted, is-it-check-is-it-art conceptual-gag context, you have no idea how you're meant to be listening, or to what. The texture? Heard it all before a degree of sluggish creepiness is reasonably and effectively maintained, though the "proper" orchestra is generally used as if it's as restricted and flat in sound-range as some classical commentators insist the guitar is. The rhythm? There is none (this is a symphony orchestra). No words either. The harmonic development? Please. Fine under "As If No Wave Never Happened", and go to seek solace in some genuine robot-music.

MARK SINGER

Cocteau Twins

Milk And Kisses

PONTANA 514 501 CD/PC

Cocteau Twins have always been so outside their time that it now seems mere coincidence that in the mid-80s they were often fingered as the thinking Goth's idea of a Pre-Raphaelite parting in sonic form.

After the more grounded sounds of *Four-Calendar Cogs*, Milk And Kisses finds the group returning to their own private sphere. It's full of songs that vault upwards like ecclesiastical architecture, the spaces full of diffracted light and Elizabeth Fraser's astonishing vocal sonnets. When familiar chiming guitars usher in the opening "Volane" it's so easy to be seduced, but when a more rational train of thought comes in, it suggests that maybe this is all sounding a touch too easy.

The group have been questioning how good their songs are recently. This prompted Simon Raymonde to strip them down to piano and voice versions for the

recent "Twilight" EP — and some of them sound a lot more satisfying in that skeletal state. It's paradoxical that such a sublime sound is usually constructed from the ruts and bolts of very obvious chord changes and cumbersome drum patterns — "Rikvan Heart", for example. But Elizabeth Fraser's multi-tracked vocals are so gorgeous that those with sensitive constitutions may find themselves in danger of passing out. The mellifluous excursions with impossibly high inflections and *trills* on "Ups" make one long to hear her voice in a different setting.

Winding back ten years or so, Fraser's backing vocals on Felt's "Primitive Painters" turned it into a tour de force. And going even further back, her version of Tim Buckley's "Song To The Siren" on the first *This Mortal Coil* album in 1983 is so briefly highlighted her as a peerless interpretive singer. *Mix And Kiosks* features her at her best, but in an all-too-familiar context. It's surely time now for the group to describe some different shapes.

PIKE BARNES

Coil Black Light District

ESKATON 008 CD

Coil's abiding interest in applying the transmutative allegory of alchemy to their music has seen them embrace new Electronica in the past, and maintain a consistent freshness in their sound. *Black Light District*, however, represents a stylistic consolidation, echoing the strains of surrealist futurism that have always been their strongest characteristic. It's still possible to hear their roots as part of the early 80s industrial scene, in their love of rhythmic loops combined with some satisfyingly nocturnal electronic drones. Luckily for those who souls for whom 'industrial' remains an off-putting term, there's a lot more than just that on this album.

What continues to set Coil's music apart is a well-developed sense of the grotesque and the esoteric. They recognise the mind-altering powers of studio-warped sound (witness the readily decodable title of one previous album, *Love's Secret Domain*), sharing, with dub, a taste for sonic predilection. They also have faith in the ability of sound to achieve more occult alterations. The rhythms on "Die Wolfe Kommen Zurück" mutate from

those of a psychedelic squash court into a stellar locomotive, all the time, densely-layered drones suggest that Coil share minimalist music's debt to Oriental serenity. On "Stoned Circular" dark, star-like vibrations give way to textural pontilism, wavy chimes, a trance rhythm cobbled together from scabrous, Aphex-like electronics. And if the vocals on "Blue Rats" — musically a combination of numbing darkness and enticing bleeps — don't suggest someone whose mind has been profoundly altered, nothing does. "Blue rats, patter patter, they're waiting for the scratch, scratch, scratch."

Enjoying Coil admirers will find much to exist here, since so many tracks adopt a classic Coil approach: "Red Skeletons", with its sewage-plant rhythms, squeezing milk bottles and siren-like laugh-track, will certainly provoke nostalgia, as will the elegiac metamorphosis from creaking birds into creaking doors that accompanies bizarre splashing and almost-churning on "Refusal Of Leave To Land". Newcomers may also come to understand why, in a sea of half-baked post-industrialism and bandwagonist "dark Ambient", Coil have proved so long-lasting.

BRIAN DOUGLAS

Ornette Coleman Chappaqua Suite

COLUMBIA CO. 480 594 2CD

The insert notes don't tell it quite like it was. In 1965, filmmaker Conrad Rooks commissioned Ornette Coleman to score *Chappaqua*, his string-outlet odyssey of a semi-autobiopic. What Ornette delivered was apparently too powerful for the director: he feared (rightly) that it would push his images gnommously into the background. Rooks then recruited Philip Glass to rehash the soundtrack. Glass, much to his credit, refused to vandalise. The film eventually included a mélange of music by Ravi Shankar and others. Against Ornette's wishes, Rooks sold French CBS the rights to an edited version of the original suite.

This is a strange rescue, right down to the reduced reproduction of the gatefold sleeve, so much of Pharoah Sanders' contribution is still missing, as I believe, is Ornette's blessing. At around 78 minutes the whole thing could easily fit on one CD, but it's a double. Let's

ignore the ethics, though, because the sounds are so transcendental.

Despite Ornette's objections, this is essential. He-interfering music: Over the years I have played the album many, many times (particularly "Part II", where the pure heart of this towering work is discovered as Ornette teaches drummer Charles Moffett and bassist David Izenzon into 16 concentrated seconds of heart-grabbing, soul-soothing blues), but it still thrills, chills, astounds, confounds and reminds you what the point of life, death and all that other heavy shit is. When, nine minutes in, the trio cuts loose from the session players, it is clear that we are in the presence of godlike genius (and I'm not talking Scott Walker here).

For once I admit to the superiority of the CD remastering: David Izenzon's microtonal basslines are clearer, and at several points you can hear an extra edge — elements of Ornette's alto ombre, which were inaudible on vinyl. When you die, and the scavengers come to pick over your bits, you'll feel a fool if this isn't on your shelf.

BARRY WITHERDEN

DJ Spooky Songs Of A Dead Dreamer

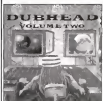
ASPHODEL 0961 CD

DJ Spooky Necropolis 'The Dialogic Project

KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KFW 115 CD

Does the DJ think? Paul D Miller takes DJ Spooky's self-appointed task is to restore meaning to the activity of recombining sounds. Tracing the etymological source of the word 'style' — the writing instrument used by the ancient Greeks — Spooky transforms the DJ from slave to the rhythm to inscriber of adult dreams. In more ways than one, he rules the decks, running them backwards, audibly slowing and stopping them dead, squeezing them through delays and racks of FX, winding them by hand to create deep drones or high-pitched whines. He's the steersman (from cyber, another loaded word with Greek origins) whose personal odyssey has so far led him across the Styx into the apocalyptic heart of entropic night, tapped by dub's version of Armageddon, David S Ware's catastrophist solar jazz, Cygnus Hill's necrophilic American

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soundcheck

Gothic, and darkcore Jungle's burial rites (Check the death-references in both album titles).

Somewhere in this channel House, with its wealth of voices, musics and ideas wringing at each other across vast expanses of glittering mud, sits Spooky with his *Book Of Loops*, a hand-painted codex of Rorschach-blot maps which he uses to steer himself through a multiplying bizzard of info-slurp.

So to the question in hand: what does this stuff sound like? Metropolis dates from 1995, a "conceptual art" mix-CD, a "mood sculpture" built from various US HipHop, Jungle and Ambient tracks, plus a couple by Joe Nason from the London Chill Out label. Three Spooky tracks are also gathered here, including his monumental 12 minute mix of MIDI trumpeter Ben Neill's "Grapheme." But to catalogue the individual tracks is to misunderstand the process (in fact, the track index goes away somewhere in the middle) in the mix Spooky co-opts them into his scheme, sampling and looping segments to provide bridge passages, chucking in police sirens and garbled scratches, or simply letting the hisses and pops of the vinyl create its own microscopic rhythms. It's been a long day, but these minuscule bips, EQed into the stereo picture, remind me of the way the Hubble telescope's deep space time lapse photography revealed more millions of distant stars than have ever been seen by the naked eye. Thus, in Spooky's hands, the mix becomes a long-absence scrying game, pointing the way towards concealed realities.

Songs of *A Dead Dreamer* is an all-Spooky programme. The sound events are generally more extreme, though the whole is cloaked in sub-HG Wells/Philp K Dick titles "The Vengeance Of Galaxy 5", "Dance Of The Morlocks", "The Terrain Invasion", "Time Out Of Joint". For the best introduction to Spooky's thick, choked world of sound, look no further than this album, although be wary: over the long haul some of the increasingly elongated loops and beatless spaces can be disorientating, enervating even. At its most feverish — "Galactic Funk" and the drum 'n' bass of "High Density", for example — is the paramount notions of flow, unwinding time and musical phantasmagoria unite and whirle past before another nebulous interlude floats up and you've forgotten what hit you.

At a time when little is required of the DJ other than to be a shaper of moods or faultless best-sequenceur, Spooky's New York's very own para-nose terminal, a John Coltrane of the decks, offering up a resonant, quivering Onympower-hum from the heart of the city.

ROB YOUNG



Dub Syndicate

On-U Breakfast
ON-U SOUND ON-U BM CD LP

HIM

Egg
SOUTHERN 195 36 CD

Two re-workings of dub's death-charge sound, if not its elastic sound manipulation one from dub's home away from home, the other from its new incarnation as the saviour of American rock.

With the demise of Thatcherism, On-U Sound lost its raison d'être. The combination of Adrian Sherwood's reverence for the political directness of both punk and 'youth music', Mark Stewart's anti-consumerist rants and dub's thundering gravitas seemed to be the perfect counterpoint to the Iron Lady's Babylonian rhetoric. As the enemy has become less obvious, however, the label's releases have sounded uncharacteristically behind the times — its once vanguard assumptions and challenges have been pushed to their limits elsewhere.

Although it asks better questions than recent On-U Sound releases, *Dub Syndicate's On-U Breakfast* can only come up with the same old answers. "Jamaican Jig" features Sherwood's stock-in-trade marabi skank, while Mark Stewart's sloganeering contribution, "The Corporation", sounds even more facile than usual because of the I Three-style, sing-song vocals. "No Lightwave Sound", however, manages to push the

envelope a bit with guitars lifted from Nigerian juju. A more troubling novelty in the Dub Syndicate formula is displayed on "Above And Beyond", which strangely embraces music's ultimate symbol of capital — the glossy, 80s sax sound (think "Careless Whisper", "True", "Smooth Operator").

Although more Jamaicans live in New York than in Kingston, the Big Apple has no dub scene to speak of. Instead, dub's dynamics get filtered into the city's dance music. Now, as dub exponent Bill Laswell's profile continues to grow, pressure drop basslines are beginning to make their way into indie rock.

Formed by ex-Codomo drummer Doug Schann, HIM are typical of America's current fascination with dub. Occasionally, Egg slips into annoying, vaguely patronising, art-house discspace. More often than not, however, HIM use dub's sound as a template for exploring the nether regions of musical abstraction. The decorated grooves of "Pamod Egg" and "Bookkeeper", reminiscent of Southern label-mates U2, are the best moments on Egg, but they also highlight the group's shortcomings.

To HIM, dub is still sound rather than process. Egg is recorded in that typically full-frontal style that rock bands are so enamoured of — there is no mark, no fog, nothing below the surface. That said, this is a promising record, and along with the magnificence of Lee Perry that appeared in a recent issue of *The Beastie Boys' Grand Royal* zone, seems to portend great things coming from across the Atlantic.

PETER SHAPIRO

Alec Empire

Hypermodern Jazz 2000 5
PHILE PLATEAU MP3 3 CD LP

Money Mark

Sometimes You Gotta Make It Alone
PHO MARK PHO 43M CD LP

Two albums that feast on the dung heap of the past, dance-wise. These are anti-music albums, records which collapse into texture and alusion and have precious little else to do. Alec Empire, with a background in diverse dance experiments, has the punkiness to push his nose to an extreme and emerges from the rubbish to with a perspective

of his own, but *The Beastie Boys'* keyboardist Monkey Mark peddles than gruel indeed. Either way, both deal in timbral jests which reduce musical content to certain key elements: an effect, a sound, a beat. All this is acutely observed and witty, but is that enough?

Alec Empire's "Space Jazz" concept ain't got much to do with Sun Ra. Jazz for this bearish child of the electronic era means a jokey Hammond riff, or demarcated vibes stretching out over repetitive beats. By the time it reaches him it's a chewed-up and spat-out concept, something less than a mannerism. There's not a drum pattern or a keyboard squirt that escapes inverted commas. But somehow the irony-laden ambience doesn't grate. Where the album really works, as in "Many Bars And No Money", it brings murderous, bass-heavy pressure to bear on a simple rhythm. Where it doesn't leg "My Funk Is Useless" it's because the things he loves and takes



the piss out of aren't interesting enough in the first place. Whatever happens, the promiscuity of his borrowing makes for a bumpy ride. However, Empire always takes the scenic route, and if these crackpot essays don't exhibit quite the unassuming wariness of Aphex or Luke Vibert there's a lot of bizarre fun to be had on the way.

On the mini-LP *Sometimes*, Money Mark wrangles around in an even thicker mire of arch musical gestures. These spare drum and piano doodles dig around in the early 70s funky jazz and jazz funk bags for inspiration. Lethargic TripHop beats abound, naturally. It's wittily inconsequential halfway between infuriating knowingsness and off the wall oddity. The best pieces are those which trade in the smug, feel-the-width organ sound and strangled vocals for studio games. However, while there seems to

be some point to Alec Empire's decadent melting pot, this is brazenly throwaway (and that's not a good thing) Cheeky cheapness is at a premium of course at Beasle Boys mansions, but this strikes me as flimsy stuff, the joke wasn't that funny in the first place Totally done (not)

WILL MONTGOMERY

Experimental Audio Research

Beyond The Pale

010 CAT 48996 CD

Pete Kember, aka Sonic Boom and the driving force behind EAR, always comes across like a contemporary De Quincey, seduced by the relationship between altered perception and sound. In *The Wire* 145, he stated "I feel you can't make real drug music without taking drugs, that's a requisite thing". It's highly likely then that *Beyond The Pale* is "drug music", but it's hard to imagine that EAR (and AMH) percussionist Eddie Prevost was out of his box while playing this. Leaving drugs aside for a moment, Kember's EAR project reclaims Ambient as less of a studio construct and more of an improvisational voyage.

Along with Prevost and Kember (the latter on synths, drones and feedback), EAR includes Kevin Martin of God and Techno Animal on treated sazes, and on one track, My Bloody Valentine guitarist Kevin Shields. Slow, rippling sounds spread to map out the surface area of the music, with a lot of the finer details going on beneath, half glimpsed in an opaque haze. Martin's sazes inject a gleaming hard surface at times, and Prevost treads characteristically lightly — perhaps too lightly here — with muted tom-toms and cymbal washes barely rising out of the sonic eddies.

Kember's spatial sense and his manipulation of the sound sources are impressive, building up vortices of sound on the 14 minute "In The Cold Light Of Day". Here ghostly chorales reminiscent of the end of Tangerine Dreams' "Alpha Centauri" wind around Martin's Terry Riley-esque sax repeats and Prevost's brassy cymbals and flickering bell tree chimes.

Beyond *The Pale* has a satisfying organic presence and reminds us that Ambient can be improvisation-based,

abetted by the unwritten rules of non-disruption a crucial element. Sonic Boom has done this kind of stuff before on some of the Spectrum material, but not as successfully. And a wholly instrumental voyage is a welcome departure from his rather banal lyrics and a methodology that usually consists of homing away at a couple of chords in an attempt to will them into something transcendental. And no doubt it's good when you're stoned

PIKE BARNES

Michael Giles/Jamie Muir/David Cunningham

Ghost Dance

RAM 502 CD

Percussion duos and ensembles, as opposed to drum solos, have always had a musical and social appeal. From military bands and tree-hugging workshops to tribal ceremonies and infant school percussion groups, there are plenty of noble and exhilarating precedents for music made by people who let off steam by boating the hell out of drums instead of each other. Michael Giles and Jamie Muir are both former members of King Crimson, and their dialogue is assisted, treated and transformed by David Cunningham, the chart-topping conceptualist behind the catchiest bits of Michael Nyman's back catalogue and *The Flying Leaves* version of Berry Gordy's "Money".

Ghost Dance is made from their soundtrack to a film by Ken McMillen that deals with the collision between ethnic cultures and Western ones. The trio of musicians raved the toy box and improvised and reacted to the footage, giving the music a loose shape and considerable variety. In addition to the poppy kazoos tunes and riffs there is a delight in the sound of these "little instruments" that is shared by the Art Ensemble Of Chicago.

The Heat's "24 Track Loop" is a procedural procedure for this less intense trio of improvising newsmakers. Sound sculpture of this nature — looping and sampling, cutting, pasting and cross-fading — is now easier, cheaper and cleaner with the aid of PC digital editing systems, but in 1983, when *Ghost Dance* was made, there was an element of struggling with materials, of compromise, accident and

achievement, that informs the final product. The CD booklet includes a French disclaimer: "This recording contains analogue tape distortion, noise and hiss which besides being unavoidable at times plays an integral part in the music."

JOHN L. WALTERS

Egberto Gismonti

Zig Zag

ECM 1582 CD

Oh dear, oh dear. Following the vigorous lyricism of *Infancia* and the impressionistic introspection of *Musica De Sobrevivencia*, and obviously dazzled by subsequent critical acclaim, Egberto Gismonti has topped headliner back into the self-reflexive abstraction which for years led him further and further away from the delights of his debut album for ECM *Dança Dos Cabeças*.

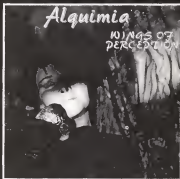
Gismonti apologists emphasise the physical jouissance of his music, and his absorption of Brazilian native cultures, to distance him from his formal, senile composition upbringing. But aside from the sheer visceral impulse of his

phenomenal playing, little of that jouissance transmits itself to the listener, (or not to this one, at any rate).

The (opening) title track chugs along for about ten of its 15 minutes with an athletic improvisation around baiao and choro forms, fleetly executed on Gismonti's ten- and 14-string guitars. It's then that fatigue starts to set in, and never lets up. Some splashy piano on "Um Anjo" comes as balm to the ear after 40 or so minutes, because while it's all terribly well-played, after a bit it's a little like being shouted at in a foreign language. While it may be a fatuous (offensive, even) generalisation to expect a Brazilian musician to make you dance every time, in 54 minutes of music sold as being the true native spirit of Brazil I want a bit more movement for my money. Similarly, I don't expect all Latin American guitar to sound like Al Di Meola, or all Brazilian melody to resemble Djavan or Ivan Lins, but when you push something as cross-cultural at least cater to a few baser Western instincts as well as our "higher" ones.

PAUL STUMP

Alquimia "WINGS OF PERCEPTION"



The music of Mexican ambient vocalist/composer **Alquimia** is "mystical, ecstatic and unique" (*Options*). "stunning...utterly convincing"...(*The Wire*, Jan. '96)... "dark, mysterious music (which) goes beyond the realms of this earth" (*Sequences*). Her new album "Wings of Perception" (AMP Records AMP-CD028) features LUKAX SANTANA (Chilean percussionist), DAVE DRAPER (*The Invisible String Quartet*) and PAUL WEBB (*O'range*).

The AMP Records budget price CD sampler (AMP-CD001) also features ALQUIMIA, plus RICHARD PINHAS (Heldons), DAVID ALLEN (Gong & Soft Machine), WHITE NOISE, ZYKLUS (Neil Ardley, Ian Carr etc) and many other innovative artists. Also available is STEVE JOLLIFFE's ambient epic "Zonal" (AMP-CD 033, reviewed in *The Wire* Feb. '96).

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soundcheck

Jimmy Giuffrè Free Fall

COLUMBIA 480 726 CD

Jimmy Giuffrè's career is one of the strangest and richest of any living musician. A big band arranger with Woody Herman in the 40s, the reeds player and composer guided the mainstream melodicism of the Trio and The River Trio, composed West Coast jazz for records such as *The Three* and *Tongues in Jazz*, and became a founding father of free improvisation with the trio of pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow. *Free Fall*, recorded in 1962, is a legendary album, though like *The Beach Boys' Smile* it is a classic most of us have never actually heard, as Giuffrè's label failed to promote the record and it was quickly deleted, after which the group fell apart. Giuffrè then had to wait 20 years to record his music in anything like the quarters it deserved.

Free Fall consists of five 'completely improvised' clarinet solos, two duets with Swallow, and three threes which include composed sections that fall imperceptibly into free improvisation. The cover — a black suited trio arranged in three dimensions over a plain white background devoid of vertical or horizontal reference — says a great deal about the music and the risks it entailed. It is a rare and tantalising glimpse between languages, a moment when anything seems possible, history abandoned and the future not yet formed. The duos and trios are all melodic, event, interval and interaction, without supports of any kind — a tense, responsive lightness to which Bley and Swallow contribute equally and often brilliantly. Giuffrè's solos are like strangely placed question marks, they start, traverse a territory (tonal, rhythmic, timbral, never harmonic) and stop, without warning, signpost or ceremony, eerie shapes left hanging in the air, beautiful, but almost unbearable in their lack of finality.

The atmosphere could not be more different from the later free jazz of Coltrane, Cecil Taylor or Albert Ayler, but in some ways this break was more radical because it doesn't sound as if this music was ever trying to be jazz at all: its brevity and sense of pulse and momentum bear little relationship to anything in modern jazz, while the wide

open spaces and oblique shadows it acknowledges are much closer to contemporary chamber music. ECM's Manfred Eicher has claimed that this group was the single most important influence on his label, but I'm not sure how closely the claim is reflected in its output, the sonarities, the sense of synchronicity and collective invention on *Free Fall* are much closer to the aesthetics of such improvisers as Derek Bailey, Evan Parker and Anthony Braxton.

This trio reformed and toured a couple of years ago, playing some of the most magical and memorable music I've ever witnessed. Their music is full of questions, and reveals itself slowly and in mysterious ways. It resonates and grows in proportion and significance, long after the moment in which it was played.

RICHARD SCOTT

Simon Goubert/ Christian Vander Welcome/Bienvenue

SEVENTH & SIX CD

An inevitably man-sized and poorly-disguised Coltrane homage from a surprisingly shy Christian Vander (of Magma fame), who takes second billing and cedes centre stage to drum demon Simon Goubert in four immense improvisations played by what is essentially a double-quartet line-up.

From the first bars of Michel Gualéri's modal "Dear Mac" you know what you're in for: quiescently mania-land-European post-bop, with fleshy, bass-heavy piano melodies, stated or intoned like chorales, transformed over rolling time-signatures and exhaustively poked clean by trulent, incisive saxophones, interspersed with general improvisatory mayhem. It's either the most anaemic music in the world or one which substitutes sweat, strength and soul for an inspirational, high-flow, expressionist lyricism. For the most part this record falls into the latter category, particularly in the heavy band of soloing in the midst of "Dear Mac", with Jean-Michel Couchet's Coltrane duelling with Yannick Reus's Ayler, all built from a pulse established at the get-go and miraculously held together by two (very loudly-mixed) basses, while Goubert and Vander go mano-a-mano.

Otto much of the rest, although Coltrane's "Reverend King" is treated

interestingly, substituting concentrated spirituality for abstracted pose and poetry. A similar atmosphere infuses Vander's serene "Ange (Rayon De Lune)", whose melancholy lines and nimble trio section are more MJQ than Melank. *Desruptiv Kommandoh*

PAUL STIMP

Bernard Herrmann The Great Hitchcock Movie Thrillers

LONDON/DECCA 443 895 CD

Bernard Herrmann Great Film Music

LONDON/DECCA 443 899 CD

Although he debuted as a film composer with Orson Welles and Citizen Kane, Bernard Herrmann made his name with Alfred Hitchcock. These are not the soundtracks as seen, but the scores re-recorded under Herrmann's direction for Decca's Phase 4 Stereo series. *The Hitchcock* album originally appeared in 1969, comprising a 14 minute "narrative for orchestra" from *Psycho*, ten-minute suites from *Marnie* and *Vertigo*, three minutes from *North By Northwest*, and an eight minute "Portrait Of Hitch" derived from the music Herrmann wrote in 1955 for his first Hitchcock film *The Trouble With Harry*. *Great Film Music* appeared in 1974, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has mutated into the National Philharmonic Orchestra, and there are passages from Herrmann's music for *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, *The Seventh Voyage Of Sinbad*, *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, *Fahrenheit 451* and (a CD addition) a 25 minute suite of themes from Gulliver's Travels (worthless 18th century pastiche, unfortunately).

Herrmann is at his most characteristic providing the sinuous, tortured strings that accompany Janet Leigh's car drive in *Psycho* or James Stewart's chilly sense of manipulation in *Vertigo*. Herrmann's innovation was to abandon the panoramic orchestral naturalism of Miklos Rozsa and Ottorino Respighi for more individualised psychoanalytic expression. Thin and nervy, a sliver cut from Mahler, the music works by association, evoking Hitchcock's definitive portrayal of the claustrophobic desperation of 50s sexual repression (or 70s Sunday afternoon viewings of Hollywood

classics on TV, depending on your point of entry).

Herrmann didn't forge the technical advances that can make music leap out of its period. Though he added electronic instruments to the orchestra for *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and had German electronic music specialists' Remy Gasman and Oskar Sala create effects for *The Birds*, he wasn't inspired by the technology of amplification; he never discovered the thing that the electric guitar brought to mass ears in the 60s and became the trademark of films scored by John Barry and Ennio Morricone. By 1966 Universal considered Herrmann too 'old-fashioned', his soundtrack for Hitchcock's *Tom Curran* was banned.

Some striking musical ideas lurk in *Great Film Music* — the comic book descending chords in *Journey*, the clacking skeleton duel in *Sinbad*, the unearthly tremor signalling 'terror' in *The Day The Earth Stood Still* — but the music is too single-minded, too effect-oriented, to work as anything more than a reminder of movie moments. Hence, since it reminds one of more iconic films, the *Hitchcock* collection is better: perfect conversation-piece ambience for panes (though the really ho host has probably bootlegged the actual soundtracks, minimal dialogue and all).

BEN WATSON

Dave Holland Ones All

VEBARIAN/INFORMATION 2148 CD

Dave Holland Quartet Dream Of The Elders

ECM 1572 CD

Ones All is bassist Dave Holland alone playing a balanced programme of original compositions and standards, of which Coltrane's "Mr PC" and Mingus's "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" make for tributes within tributes. Superbly recorded (on analogue tape) by James Farber, and co-produced by his wife Clare, Holland's sound is full and clear, the pieces are both structured and passionate and the bassist swings and emotes where needed. I can't fault the project, other than to wonder who buys whole albums of solo bass. (Other bass players? It'll be a hit.)

Dream Of The Elders, a quartet album, reminded me of unreasonable affection for

Descension
Live March 1995
SHOCK SMOKE CO

Writing in *The Wire* 125, Will Montgomery sounded a warning: "There's a danger that the revival of radical interest in free jazz associated with St. Thurston et al. (and spurred by John Zorn's rentacore exploits) will lead to a hideous thrombosing of the music — with an uncritical reverence for pure energy and the thrill factor of dissonance." Fair enough, if you assume that free improvisation's function is to provide an alternative to rock, an 'improving' dose of higher values. However, if you actively crave energy and thrill — and loud guitars — such high-mindedness seems dull.

So dull, in fact, that Descension blazon the quote on the disc itself, then attack it with a glorious cascade of music that proves it is precisely the pursuit of pure energy and dissonant thrill that can make something vital out of improvisation, can slough off the decorative, artsy trappings of 'alternative' ideology and blast back at the Prog rock revival currently using Ambient as its hi-tech stalking horse.

As Ascension, Stefan Jaworzyn (guitar) and Tony Irving (drums) proved that the obnoxious, sociopathic aspect of punk could fuse Improv attention-to-the-moment with rock's emotional density. Here they are joined by Simon Fell (super-armed double bass) and Charles Wharf (soprano sax). It has the gauntlet-in-the-face impact of music that changes lives, if you let this infusion of negative energy fill your veins, you'll reject a lot of the music and thank its authors you've been suffering for far too long.

Jaworzyn's trash aesthetic (he edits an excellent splatter-video guide, *Shock X-Press*, and has released some sterling lo-fi, including *Cosmonauts* Hat Sutan and New Zealand's crucial *The Dead CI* vaults over Fell's serial-bop modernism into melismatic armageddon. The guitar's rugged complicity of ever-different figures and knots shows that Derek Bailey has finally been understood by someone unconcerned to stroke holier-than-thou souls in the art parlour.

Lacking the massed grandeur of *Last Exit* — perhaps the nearest comparison — Descension's attack has a naster, shrier edge, one that keeps unzipping new textures, new note tumbles. Charles Wharf's soprano is a slash fight between a steam kettle and a razorblade. Descension don't adopt the wall-of-sound cool, the Velvets folk-drone that made God such a disappointment (an earlier attempt to fuse rock-noise and Improv: each note is a vector zealous with conscious decision. The 30 minute live in Leeds set ("recorded in a horrible gymnasium") has a roomy, astral quality, whereas the 40 minutes from a Walthamstow creche is aural crucifixion with so many from-in-flesh beauties you just have to keep playing it.

Abstract art has always started at ornament. Descension prove that this snarl is essential if musical art is to matter, and constitute something more weighty than a guarantee of superiority to the lower orders and their deplorable fixation on bodily thrills. In other words, this is more thrilling than *Motörhead*, and that's why it's great. Sonic revolution! Get to it.

BEN WATSON

Descension's Simon Fell



PHOTO: JEFF

the lower stave, and "Lazy Snake" starts with a couple of minutes of solo arco playing before the group dig in for ten minutes of mainstream modern jazz of the highest standard. This is not a cutting edge album, though (if you listen to Eric Dolphy's *Our To Lunch* (which featured Bobby Hutcherson on vibraphone), you'll be struck by how explosively contemporary the older album sounds).

Holland may be the only white Englishman on the session, but his young players (with Fairbair engineering again) have captured the elusive soul of British jazz to make a record Holland could never have made in London. Weakest moment is the radio play track "Equality", a rather over-reverential setting of Maya Angelou's poem sung by Cassandra Wilson, who is good, but no Norma Winstone.

JOHN L. WALTERS

Anna Homler/Geert Waegeman/Pavel Fajt
Mancaroni Sines

LOWLANDS LOW 002 CD

Fukkeduk
Ornithozozzy

LOWLANDS LOW 003 CD

Imagine a pop song played entirely on cutlery: a little gamelan of forks, spoons and the odd kettle clucking into a sink of water. If this sounds attractive you'll enjoy at least one track on *Mancaroni Sines*. This is the best album yet from the intriguing vocal and performance artist from LA, Anna Homler. 1994's *Allen* Coke was an intimate desecration, but this time everything is recorded in bright Belgian daylight by Geert Waegeman. Homler has a clear, characterful voice that can stand comparison with the Hungarian Marta Sebestyen. Influenced by many styles, from Jewish and East European to African, she sings with great pose in her own private language, and shifts easily into a distinctive yodel or African vocal cliking.

The Czech Pavel Fajt's excellent percussion is known from his work with Iva Bittova, while Waegeman contributes sturdy violin and straight-to-the-point guitar. Together they build a weird trehouse of milkily acoustic songs, often coming on like a wayward pop group from somewhere impossibly exotic, Samarkand, maybe. On one song Fajt drums along with the pattering

late 60s British jazz regular pulses splintering into Tony Daley-sh ogreisms. Harry Beckett's bubble and squeaks, modal variants in damp warehouses and fragile themes of cosmic melancholy. Not to mention talents such as Mike Taylor and Phil Lee and the creative legacy of Ronnie Scott's Old Place. For a moment, when John McLaughlin and Dave Holland joined Miles, British jazz musicians were at the diche-tre heart of the seasons that almost changed the world. Yet however good, influential or overrated you consider *In A Silent Way* or *Birches Brew*, you'd hardly know from those discs what Dave Holland was capable of doing with

the double bass tradition. He left Miles in 1971, still in his early 20s, anxious to learn, to develop, to explore other musics after his baptism of fire and ice and he's been making good music ever since.

Bassist leaders are in a great position to keep a grip on improvising groups, particularly when the tunes are based on cyclic patterns, such as the riffs in "The Windy Way" and the alternate eight and four of the title track. *Dream Of The Ebers* showcases Holland as group leader, composer, virtuosic rhythm section player, and manages to sound like, yes, British jazz — but performed and recorded with a skill and ease not

possible three decades ago. "Clarensence", dedicated to his wife, is a lightweight tune with the kind of straight-ahead blowing Holland obviously loves to play. During the solos from Steve Nelson (bass and marmite) and Eric Person (soprano and alto saxes) it is, more often than not, the bass that catches the ear.

Drummer Gene Jackson has a good rapport with his boss and Nelson impresses as a soloist who likes to tell a story, dropping in non-ironic quotes from great jazz standards. Good to hear the marmite used so well in a small group, too. "Ebb And Flo" is a good example of the way Holland leads from

soundcheck

exhaust of his car. My only gripe is that Homer doesn't sing in English, thereby removing an important dimension of the music (for English speakers, at least).

More compelling performances from the highly original, Belgium-based Lowlands label, this time from the sequestered Fokkduk. The two strengths here are the utter commitment of the playing from the cello/low/trombone/drums (etc.) line-up, plus the quality of the writing, mostly the work of saxophonist Nicolas Roseaux. Dipping freely into klezmer, Kurt Weill, Michael Nyman and Algerian tango bands, Fokkduk also rock the box enough to create splashes of free playing reminiscent of Misha Mengelberg's wild Dutch groups.

Nick Dokonyai (aka Dr Nerve) came over from New York to produce, and the result is good-humored and convincing. Jan Kuglen's fiery cello stands out, and there are hilarious over-the-top rock intrusions by guitarist Frank Ghysels — hilarious partly for being so brief. The best track is "Lulu De L'Odeur De Bib", which is kind of Astor Piazzolla rocks out and has a saw solo. An equivalent British group would be hard to find, though it certainly reminded me of my days with Kahondo Style, another seven-piece featuring cello, violin, trombone.

CLIVE BELL

Paul Jorgensen Seeds

REPOPI CD

Everything Is Slow! Symbols And Cymbals

LOWLANDS/SLOW LOTS CD

It's instructive (if a little bewildering) to see just how far the notion of a Fourth World has permeated pop culture, from a *Helix* photo-spread of Linda Evangelista modeling traditional Zulu garb (and there's a liberal dilemma: take fur or fake culture?) to charts full of the sounds of African pygmies and Spanish monks and native Americans.

These two CDs, while very different, both reveal the pitfalls of all this cultural tourism, while exhibiting few, if any, of its benefits. *Everything Is Slow!* is the Belgian production team Bernie Jacobs and Fredric Fumelle, who apparently create music for a live show which features jugglers, fire-eaters and acrobats — a kind of Stoke Newington-

as-performance art, I guess. Not having seen the show I can't comment on it, but I'm less than encouraged by the music presented by this (for the record, appallingly titled) CD.

It's lovingly created stuff, with Bernie and Fredric joined by a host of players whose collective arsenal includes mandolins, hurdy gurdies, sitars, synthesizers, sazes, dannels, percussion and the inevitable didgeridoo. The styles these players plunder are suitably diverse, too: a smatch of New Orleans Dixie here, a blast of (unspecific) African drumming there. Yet like so much of this kind of thing, it's all a bit like a film soundtrack in search of a film, or worse, a highly ornate jingle in search of a commercial. This should damn the music, but I suspect it could be the source of its success.

I'm sure that guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Paul Jorgensen's occasional forays into minimal (for a change) genuinely dark soundscapes will help *Seeds* avoid any such popularity, but these, alas, are not too frequent exceptions. Elsewhere, Jorgensen, hampered, I venture, by a surfeit of musicianship, resorts to irrelevant fusion guitar solos, the odd bit of very soft raga rock and even an atrocious 'worldly' MOR ballad. Which is a shame, somewhere in here there's some good (if a little derivative) music struggling to get out.

On the whole these records offer up some increasingly common and unimaginative answers to the question: whether World Music? Unavoidably *but*, they still lack the 'authentic' inauthenticity of the theme park or shopping mall, and for that alone they're already hopelessly out of date.

SIMON HOPKINS

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan & Michael Brook Night Song

REAL WORLD/CORVUS CD

The power of Qawwali music lies in the vocal delivery — the word itself means 'utterance' — and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's previous albums have all been testaments to the extraordinary power and range of his voice. The same cannot be said for *Night Song*. Khan's previous collaboration with Michael Brook, *Muhammad*, was a subtle but effective fusion of Western and Eastern traditions, which

succeeded by ceding the upper hand to the East. Here the opposite is true. This is a collection of Western song structures using largely Western instrumentation with Khan's vocals seemingly grafted on.

Forsaking his regular musicians — mainly his family — Khan finds himself adrift in a studio assemblage, alongside such unfamiliar instruments as electronic keyboards and percussion, cello, electric bass, even "acid with treatment", whatever that is. His only links with home are Dildar Hussain's tabla playing and younger brother Farukh on harmonium. But their contributions are only incidental. For the most part there's a sense of hyperrealism, as if, in their struggle for Eastern authenticity, these Western musicians have created a soundscape that's just that little bit too



wired — and hence, obviously artificial.

Only once, on the title track, where Khan sings accompanied only by his own keyboards, does the dialogue between voice and music achieve a true sense of unity. Elsewhere, the spontaneous nature of his own musical heritage struggles in the context of such an obviously 'manufactured' sound. What's most absent from this album is the familiar sense of exuberance. His voice still mesmerizes given the opportunity, as it is on "Intoxicated" and "Loving", but too often there's a doubtful feel to the music, a sense of restraint that's largely alien to him. It can work well, as on the opening "My Heart, My Life", but it can also be very disingenuous, as on "Sweet Pain", where the pitch of Khan's voice just doesn't sit with the tone of the music at all.

Ironically, judged solely on instrumental merit, this is an extremely satisfying work, encompassing edgy, minimalist funk, multi-layered guitar chromatics, shifting TripHop-influenced

beats, and producer Brook's own brand of nebulous, shifting-sand Electronica. But that's the point. You find yourself listening more to the instrumentation. And on an album featuring a voice like Khan's, that's unforgivable.

PETER MCINTYRE

King Sunny Ade E Dide Get Up

PERAKAST WEST 7361 92644 CD

Island's choice of King Sunny Ade as the 'new Bob Marley' in the early 80s should have created a worldwide phenomenon, but not for any commercial reasons. The stunning rhythmic complexity of Nigerian music was certainly never going to sustain a long career in the West, but juju's maze of interlocking rhythms, at once soothing and provocative, is as deep an exploration of the intersection between space and groove as anything by Pt. or King Tubby.

Pre-Island, Ade was a master guitar soloist in the finest Nile Rodgers funk style. But it was the collision between juju's polyrhythms and the Roland DX7s of his French producer that created a truly mesmerizing overload of contradicting beats and textures ten years before Cubase. Since Sir Shina Peters streamlined juju's maximalism, however, very little has been heard of it, let alone Ade, in the West. *E Dide Get Up* offers one reason why.

All of the familiar elements — Hawaiian slide guitar, talking drums, sweet vocals — are in place, but the record is flat and lifeless. The guitars do their best to imitate their percolating groove, but the drums just don't move. The clash between hard funk and hypnotic, instrumental mantra that made Ade's early 80s albums so effective fails to materialize here. *E Dide Get Up* is pleasant, harmless listening, but all the more frustrating for it.

PETER SHAFROD

Joe Maneri/Joe Morris/Mat Maneri Three Men Walking

ECM 1597 CD

Joe Maneri Quartet Let The Horse Go

LED RECORDS LP 232 CD

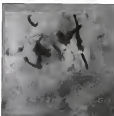
It happens rarely, but every now and again an album comes along which

makes you hear differently. One such record was last year's *Get Ready To Receive Yourself* by the Joe Maneri Quartet. To enter Maneri's world of microtonal jazz is to enter a new world entirely. Here is a way of making music that draws on various 'folk' traditions, microtonal composition and jazz improvisation, and creates something completely surprising by using a wider, more subtle sound spectrum than is customary. The first few seconds of each of these CDs are enough to state that this is distinct and new territory. What follows is in both cases remarkable.

Reeds player Maneri, born in 1927, is professor of theory and composition at Boston's New England Conservatory. He teaches his own microtonal system, which has 72 notes to the octave. His career has been idiosyncratic in the extreme. He took to the road at 15 and his working life has since taken in Hungarian gypsy music, a 12-tone improvisation group (this in 1946), a long and inspirational course of study with Josef Schmidt, an exiled Austrian and former pupil of Alban Berg, Greek music, which fed into an increasing interest in microtones, a 1960s piece commissioned for the Boston Symphony Orchestra which they had to abandon as it was too difficult to play, and, on and off, a jazz group. It was an appearance at the Montreal Jazz Festival at the behest of pianist Paul Bley that brought him to wider attention.

Son Mat applies his father's ideas to electric violin and puts them to his own uses, developing extraordinary microtonal harmonies as he goes. On *Three Men Walking* (cf. Gasconetti's sculpture) they are joined by guitarist Joe Morris, one of the most profound

improvisers at work in the US. Each of the musicians has a thoroughly assimilated range of 'non-Western' interests to add to a minutely shaded palette. For all the diverse ingredients there are no real points of comparison for the music they end up making together, though the Bley connection



seems appropriate — the unsettling, broken quietness of the recording is occasionally reminiscent of the *Gutter/Bleed/Swallow* trio of the early 60s (see the newly reissued *Free Fall*). But it can't be stated enough that this is music that works its own groove, at once deeply unusual and as natural as breathing.

The very different, busier quartet record features both Maneri (the group was initially Mat's anyway), John Lockwood on bass and Randy Peterson on percussion. As with their previous album the music slips between the floorboards of the known. Having a percussionist (as opposed to Morris's subtly percussive picking) emphasises a different area of indeterminacy. It's evasive music, just when you think it will resolve itself into a recognisable quartet dynamic. It breaks up and turns elsewhere.

A feeling of instability and open-endedness seems central to the work. And this elusiveness remains fascinating over and over again, especially at the points where the two Maneris communicate against each other.

The pair make uneasy listening indeed, but are infinitely rewarding. These are not the kind of albums that merely add a grain to the pile of conventional wisdom, instead they rustle in the dark as they pass, quietly scattering our assumptions as they go.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Colin Matthews Hidden Variables

COLLINS CLASSICS 14702 CD

Minimalism usually presents itself as an attempt to return music to a pristine state. That doesn't mean that minimalism lacks profundity, but it tends to imply a stand against complexity, a stand that some see as phallic, others as absolutely necessary. But what if minimalism is, not as a philosophical stance, but as one tool among many at the composer's disposal?

That seems to be Colin Matthews's position in a note accompanying this CD. Anthony Bly suggests that modernism and minimalism are engaged in a "battle for the soul of modern music", implying that Matthews, on the side of modernism, uses minimalist devices ironically. That may be so, but I don't know that the listener would gather as much simply from listening to the four pieces here (all performed by The London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas). In *Hidden Variables* Matthews deploys Reichian

intennabulations to disrupt, if only temporarily, the orchestral turmoil, as if reining the music back from a descent into (ignominiously controlled) chaos. Or, to put it another way, when the orchestra is in danger of getting pompous, minimalist murmurs out it down to size: minimalism with a modernist purpose.

Of course, not every use of repetitive rhythms by a contemporary composer should be labelled 'minimalist'. Perhaps where Matthews differs most significantly from Reich, Glass, et al, is that whereas they tend to take reduced material and work towards its essence, Matthews works outward, weaving the material into a dense orchestral fabric constructed quite differently. And that fabric is beautifully worked, with an attention to colour that goes right back to Wagner. In that sense, the most recent work here, *Memento* (1993), is the most impressive, at times monumental, at others savage and brutal. The piece was written in part as a response to Edw. Lutyens's huge First World War memorial at Thiepval in northern France. The way Matthews welds together epic grandeur and bitter anger is wholly appropriate.

Not everything here is as sombre. The live recording of *Machines And Dreams* even lets us hear that rare event, an audience laughing with, rather than at, a contemporary composer. What's more, the humour survives through repeated plays, and that's rarer still. Matthews is an important figure in contemporary British music, not least in his position as executive producer for the NMC label. This is the second CD of his music (after Deutsche Grammophon's *Broken Symmetries*) to appear in the last 12



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Harry Partch
Enclosure Two

INOMA 603 CD

Harry Partch
17 Lyrics Of Li Po

TRADK 127012 CD

Since his death in 1974, the music and writings of Harry Partch have remained obscure and difficult to obtain. As large-scale theatre works have been made available on CD, the earlier and smaller pieces from this American composer, theorist and instrument inventor only ever appeared on his own Gate 5 Records label, and those private pressings are long deleted.

Enclosure Two is therefore some kind of miracle, as it contains four CDs of pure Partch that has been gleaned from his estate's archive. Compiled by Philip Blackburn for the Minnesota Composers Forum, this is one of three releases which focus on different aspects of Partch's work and ideas. *Enclosure Three* (available in August) will be a facsimile scrapbook of Partch's writings, letters, drawings, photos and ephemera, all of which promises to throw new light on a musician who has remained in the shadows of obscurity for too long.

It is in the material of *Enclosure Two*, however, that the music and quicksilver inventiveness of Partch's agile brain begin to shoot sparks, and even when long passages of spoken narrative threaten to eclipse the glowing brilliance of his compositions there is still a certain rough music to be heard resonating in that unique voice of his. Partch certainly has plenty of tales to tell, the best of these being "Extracts From Bitter Music, A Hobo Journal" which fills the entire third disc (a live performance prepared by Warren Burt for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1992). With only the occasional (apparently hated) piano keyboard flourish to accompany certain sections of the monologue, Partch's powerful narrative about being a bum in California is an important insight into a part of his life which he eventually abandoned but never truly forgot. Later he attempted to abort the finished written work to keep it from being performed, that this recorded performance exists in any state is another of this set's major miracles.

Elsewhere, other aspects of Partch's strange world are disclosed, including examples of his famous musical instruments in action. For many listeners the mass of reeded and spoken material here will be overbearing, and the chance to hear his

music alone will come as a relief. It has to be said, however, that alongside such contractions as the Chromelodeon and the Adapted Viola, Partch was his own greatest musical invention.

The arsenal of fragile instrument/sculptures that he created are now under the curatorship of the US contemporary orchestral group Newband, led by Partch enthusiast Dean Drummond. Apparently, Drummond plans to build exact touring replicas of these constructions so that Partch's music can be taken to the concert halls again.

A growing interest in Partch's work suggests that Drummond's plans are not just the fantasies of a lone fanatic. Already, John Zorn has pushed the boat out by commissioning a recording of *17 Lyrics Of Li Po*, an early Partch composition that has been released on Zorn's Tzadik label. This haunting, harmonic instrumental/vocal drone piece appears in its original (although incomplete) form on the *Enclosure Two* set, but here the entire work is performed with Stephen Kalin's intoning voice and Ted Mook on tenor violin. As good as this recording is, the absence of Partch's immediate personality makes it sound only partially there, as though something fundamental to the piece (Partch himself) was left out of the mix.

The Tzadik CD is a brave and welcome addition to the Partch canon, but it is dwarfed by the jaw-dropping excellence of the archive material on *Enclosure Two*.

EDWIN POUNCEY



months, and it shows an original, thoughtful and engaging talent at work.

NICK KIMBERLEY

Michael Morley
The Pavilion Of Fools

FLICK 1511 CD

Michael Morley is a member of the New Zealand group The Dead C, familiar to UK listeners through a 1994 release on the Shock label *World Peace Hole Et Al*. There, smashed to-hi rock encountered free improvisation somewhat untidily; this disc is more seamless. The soundtrack for an art installation, it comes in shiny white cardboard with a military map of warning sites for nuclear attack. Since 1989, early 80s UK paranoia about Europe becoming the theatre for nuclear exchange has

abated. New Zealanders are more aware of the facts of radiation and government preparations for holocaust because of the recent mass protests against French nuclear tests. What can mere art do about these issues?

Morley arranges blocks of distorted guitar with constructed discoveries. Although each texture is full of activity, occasionally suggesting rock guitar solo excesses and Szeged-style feedback mantras, it is the abrupt transitions that impress like Matt Wand of Stock,hausen & Walkman. he has a sensitivity to the length of a sound's duration that has more in common with early 20th-century abstraction than musically schooling.

Spoken word samples at the end don't seem a good idea, they aren't collaged

with the skill of the guitar parts, and degrade the unerring polish of the rest. Morley has the fine ear for timbre

required for mixing musique concrète, although this music stems from the lo-fi network, it could just as well be something on the Metamkore label's 'Onéma Pour L'Oreille' series. It's politically inspiring to find someone eschewing both dominant modes of music-making and dominant ways of killing people.

The press release says of the Bomb, "we have only ourselves to blame". Funny that, I thought it was a result of a world economy based on national competition, not a punishment for universal sin. The apolitical consolation of moral myth an ever-present temptation for would-be oppositional art.

BEN WATSON

Katharine Norman
London

NMC 0034 CD

Katharine Norman makes DAT street recordings, but wisely doesn't suppose mere technology can justify the price of a CD. She montages her sources using loops, digital trincures and overlays, though London is not aimed at New Age listeners (those who require a pile of lush tracks before they will step on the magic carpet).

Use of environmental recording is a hotly contested topic. John Cage's Zen-like pronouncements about "surrender to nature" and "transcending human intention" left a poor conceptual legacy, one in which less scrupulously inventive artists have flourished.

Cage's actual compositions were challenging and incongruous, almost perverse in the way each new work drew attention to the material mediation of musical ideas, yet his name is now regularly cited by people who wish to give therapeutic mindwash, muzak and mainstream pop — surely the most socially conformist sonic available — an 'avant garde' cachet. Norman prefers to cite Sergio Eisenstein.

London begins with Norman's mother talking in her front room about doodlebugs and the Blitz. Sonic filters reminiscent of Laurie Anderson colour her voice, but this merely serves to emphasize the distance between inhabitants of East End terrace houses and artsy New Yorkers. A stroll through Walthamstow market alerts us to the hilarious patchwork of accents that make up a cosmopolitan working class, we end up in a foot tunnel beneath the Thames.

The succession of recording ambiances — living room, street, reverberant tiled cylinder — stays in the mind like an abstract composition, but one made up of myriad details amusingly familiar to any Londoner ('mind the gap'), 'Trilling Wire' has Jonathan Cooper play Brattonish, high-pressure clarinet against a tape collage. It demonstrates that Norman's skill at documentary montage comes from the same insistence on musical event that created the supposedly 'inaccessible' soundworld of Darmstadt modernism.

London recalls Walter Rutman's pioneering 'blank-sound' film of 1930 Berlin, *Weekend* (now released by Metakine). It uses new technology to help us imagine the complex reality of the city. In her sieve-tones, Norman says that it was the Gulf War which made her think of asking her mother to talk about the Blitz. Although there are oddities around with more pointedly political things to say (that the famous use of the tube system as underground shelters was only granted by the authorities after riots and Communist Party agitation, for example), Norman's interest in the historical resonance of her sonic materials has a musical tension lacking in the fatuous 'deep listening' proposed by Cage's well-fed epigones.

BEN WATSON

p53
p53
RIR RIR P53 CD

La 1919
Jouer. Spielen. To Play
MATERIAL SONOR P530 CD 90063 12957
0003 CD

Aksak Maboul
Une Peu De L'Âme Des
Bandits
CRAMPED DISCS CRAM 002 CD

On paper, the combination of musicians on p53 looks irresistible. Chris Cutler initiated the project, which was commissioned by the Frankfurt jazz festival in 94 from where this recording comes. He features on drums, 'low grade electronics' and 'objects', and is joined by German electroacoustic composer Lutz Glandorf on samples and real time processing, two grand pianos played by Marie Goyette and Zygmunt Krause, and Otomo Yoshihide on home-built guitar and turntables.

The accompanying information gives the tale of Chris Cutler's albums as 'over 75', presumably because he's lost count. p53 is apparently another formulation of Cutler's 'cultural debris theory'. Those not familiar with this aspect of Cutler's never less than rigorous line of reasoning needn't be put off. Its sonic manifestation on this album is self explanatory. The line-up is deliberately diverse, the most remarkable aspect being the pitching of the grand pianos against Otomo's turntables. While Krause takes on the role of 'pure' improviser, Goyette acts as a kind of 'human sampler', skirting around and occasionally buried by violent sonic upheavals, playing snatches of well known classical repertoire such as Rachmaninov and Chopin. This is echoed by Otomo's utilisation of well known vinyl.

The sense of space here is of paramount importance with many long, texturally rich, quiet passages. This pile-up of 'debris' makes one wonder if this is principally another serving from the postmodernist pot, but the musicians pull through with an inspired sense of purpose. p53's statements can be moving, and funny, too.

La 1919's *Jouer. Spielen. To Play* is a very different improvised album. Recorded live in Italy in 1991 and 92, it's a collaborative venture between Cutler and fellow drummer Charles

Hayward, Italian musicians Piero Chinuria (samplers and keyboards) and guitarist Roberto Zora and Luciano Margari. Though totally improvised, this music often appears structured, or the product of a high quality jam session. There's some flash guitar and keyboard playing here that sounds — dare I say it — more than a little Prog rockish. One wonders what the Italian contingent made of Charles Hayward's singing on 'Sheffield Wednesday, Pancake Tuesday, Sheffield Wednesday, Mournful Thursday, mango fish Good Friday' — English humour at its most elliptical. An interesting but curiously unlikable set.

Un Peu De L'Âme is a reissue of a recording from 1979 which found Cutler and Fred Frith, not long out of Henry Cow, chancing upon another avant rock group with a bassist. Aksak Maboul had been The Honeycomb Killers but were swelled by their members to a seven-piece for this record.

At times they developed the same chamber rock complexity as Henry Cow, swapping phrases at quixotic speed. There's a tongue-in-cheek naivety in the bassoon/piano/violoncello ensemble of 'Palmer's En Pots', which sounds like 30s Berlin restaurant music, or at least how one imagines it would have sounded.

Sax and bassoon burst out on 'Gesteige Nacht', holding firm like high octave Stravinsky wind chords over an exploratory rhythmic base. Turkish and Middle Eastern hybrids abound, and just when it seems partly classifiable, 'Inoculating Rabies' features Frith's dirty rock 'n' roll blow-out guitar. Long deleted, this is something of a classic of its genre — whatever that genre is.

MIKE BARNES

Martin Rev
See Me Rudin'

ROR USA RUC DR2 20 CD

Last year's performance at London's Doobie Club by Martin Rev, the 'Instrument' side of New York City's legendary Suicide duo, raised hopes that a full blown Rev recording project might be on the cards. And here it is. Except the music on *See Me Rudin'* is a long way from that Doobie show, where Marty twirled his way through an extended electronic pulsation piece that ended with him striking a pose that fell somewhere between Saturday Night Fever-era John Travolta and Elvis circa

10% file under burroughs

After a decade of being the most talked about new act in music, the 10% file under burroughs have now released their debut album, *sub rosa sr93*. The album is a collection of tracks that range from the hard rock of 'sub rosa' to the more experimental 'sr93'.



featuring
scanner
bomb the bass
john cale
your nemesis
paul bowles
material
islamic diggers
marianne faithful
divination
vs burroughs
herbert huncke
chuck prophet
joujouka
creative art books/best
distributed by and
sub rosa
sr93



soundcheck

his black leather-clad 1968 comeback

On *See Me Rejoice*, the characteristic atmosphere of neon-lit, electronic urban dread, and its accompanying machine-pulse, has been stripped away. In its place is a 'twisted' take on bubblegum pop. Worse than this, Murly sings, in a sentimentalized twang that brings to mind "Peggy Sue" rather than "Cherise Chere". The record only comes alive when Rev concentrates fully on his instrument. "Man Go Round," "Ten Two" and "Postcard" are not great Rev, but they at least act as bearable diversions before he breaks once more into crack-throated song.

Although this is a record close to Rev's rock 'n' roll/slowdown roots, it is also one that will puzzle his admirers and alienate any late newcomers to his music, who may be curious to learn just what all the fuss is about. See *Me Rejoice* sounds like artistic suicide.

EDWIN PONCEY

Yande Codou Sene & Youssou N'Dour Gambia

WORLD NETWORK 29 58 391 CD

The European World Music market has been fairly predictable of late, mostly concerned with re-recording or repackaging the same old stuff and picking out a few stars to give the big production treatment and marketing push. Youssou N'Dour's fans (and he really does have fans), both here and in West Africa, have been particularly patient, happy when he produces something that even hints at the quality of his youthful work with Super Etalo De Dakar. I have been resigned to the view that his taste may never again be equal to his talent, but Gambia suggests plenty of avenues for hope. Yande Codou Sene is a female Sereer traditional singer who is credited with inspiring the young Youssou to become a singer himself. Now in her sixties, this is her first CD and the duo's first collaboration.

About half the album is given over to Sene and her group which, although clearly Senegalese, is very different from anything else most of us will have heard before. All the usual West African elements are here: the instrumentation, repetition and call and response vocals are familiar enough, but the way they are organised (and the extent to which they are organised) is very unusual and specific, as is the polyphonic vocal choir

which backs her. The rest of the CD is made up of two solo pieces, instrumentals and Senegalese/N'Dour collaborations. These emotionally charged duets, "Lees Waaf" and "Ten Jooro Waaf", are lovely, capturing Sene's enormously impressive declamatory roar, while N'Dour's own vocal performances are scarcely less exciting. But it would be a shame if these two tracks were to obscure the rest of the record, which includes "Samba", where N'Dour experiments with some very unusual vocal overdubbing, and "Re Fa Tame", a brief instrumental duet between Mbaye Ndiaye's fiddle and Assane Thiam's talking drum, which is



about as close as Senegalese music gets to free improvisation.

In its varied content this is a unique record. The fact that a highly evolved traditional music, studio experimentation, a couple of songs and spontaneous jamming can sit side by side is very appealing, and I suspect it represents the real concerns of musicians a good deal more closely than most of the other ways World Music and traditional music gets recorded and marketed. It is implicit that the recording process has been musician-directed, rather than guided by a musicologist, producer or record company, none of whom would have come up with the same connections. It's a fascinating record, which apart from anything else, will make me think twice about being so rude about N'Dour in future. When he's not being a pop star he can still be a great musician.

RICHARD SCOTT

Spacer

Atlas Earth

PULSIFOOT COLOUR CD, LP

Luke Gordon, aka Spacer, is sometimes engineer for the likes of French Mo' Wax

artists Le Funk Mob, and former James Taylor Quartet saxophonist Chris Bowden. *Atlas Earth*, released on Howe B's post-HipHop label Pulsifoot, is an album that blurs the boundaries between art and craft, the music here is constructed as much as performed, with the various elements, both live and programmed, assembled and compiled with an ultra-minute attention to detail. Sound-in-itself is everything.

Such precision is the antithesis to the majority of TripHop, as this album will undoubtedly be (mis)labelled TripHop is largely viscous music, relying as much on the breakbeat as drum 'n' bass, but slowing down the latter's clipped, staccato drum patterns until they resemble a form of rhythmic sludge. Gordon himself falls prey to this on a couple of occasions, on "Agent Orange" and "Fuzzy Fiest", but even here, the music is enlivened by the melodic juxtapositions which skim the surface: the cinematic sweep of strings swooning over guitar arpeggios on the former; gently undulating vibes and lifting piano tones on the latter.

Otherwise, this is fluid music, sound in constant motion. Gordon's particular skill is to create this sense of fluidity out of seemingly disparate elements. "Dead On Arrival" commences with the sub-aquatic burble of Ambient Electronica, before descending into a sampladelic maelstrom of timestretched bells, turntable scratching, even seals, emerging into a balmy rhythmic drift, only to end on the elegant tones of a single violin. It's as if each track has its own internal narrative, with each individual element both commenting upon and anticipating the others. Postmodern HipHop, perhaps?

On "Smash Mud Filter", Gordon proves that simple synth oscillations can induce feelings of longing and despair, and the sense of lingering drama engendered by a clever use of space in the arrangement of "Vanishing Point" is enhanced by the short, intense swoops of Chris Bowden's saxophone, as he dives into the gaps. In fact, the only jarring note struck in an otherwise excellent set is the stark, psychobabble poetry with which Gordon chooses to adorn the opening and closing tracks. Proof positive that actions do indeed speak louder than words.

PETER MCINTYRE

Jamaaladeen Tacuma Dreamscape

DWE 904 CD

Gave Tacuma his due: where so many of his peers are falling headlong into fusions where playing takes second place to processing, this technician keeps his funk live and direct. The first track here is a bass solo so twanging that one can almost feel the strings flexing under his fingers. While Marcus Miller fiddles, Jamaaladeen burns.

For Dreamscape he's assembled another one of his snapping and squalling groups to play most of the tracks. The lineage probably has its roots in James Brown and Jack McDuff, but what's going on here isn't much more than a breath away from the jazz funk outfits which Defunkt exemplified in the early 80s. Rock larrucone (guitar), Ben Schacter (saxes) and Jethro Barron (trumpet) can all play, but it's unlikely they'll be remembered by future generations for their individual mastery. They're pieces in a puzzle that Tacuma shakes around as he pleases, which is why the music tends to be exciting or thoughtful or galvanic from moment to moment, but drifts off over the long haul of a CD.

Cut in a few days in Philadelphia, maybe this is just one of Jamaaladeen's quickies. After his Gramavision albums, which rolled past listeners like overstuffed shopping trolleys, Tacuma seems stuck for the content for a talent that somebody ought to take in hand. Three of the tracks here are called "Bass In Ya Face", "Groove With An Attitude" and "Sun In The Funk". Pardon me, but haven't we heard this sort of thing before?

RICHARD COOK

Masahiko Togashi & Mototeru Takagi Isolation

TAKE ONE RECORDS 7801-1503 CD

Masahiko Togashi Season In Paris Volumes 1 & 2

TAKE ONE RECORDS 7801-1501/2 CD

Togashi and Takagi together were like Brotzmann and Johansson in 1969 — flamethrower saw over blue-touchepaper drums — and listening now is more nostalgic than anything. In truth,



The Pop Group

Y
BADMUSCAN 14 CD

No legacy has been so squandered as that of the brief, ill-starred collaboration between The Pop Group and reggae producer Dennis Bovell: as if no one dared grasp what had been done. But then, no record's conditions of creation could be less easy to imitate: digital midtown makes instant what would have taken weeks using tape-space.

I know we're supposed to acknowledge that Adrian Sherwood has carried the torch of headbuck dub into the 90s; that On-U Sound embodies the spirit of the New Age Steppers, who evolved out of the milieu round The Sits and The Pop Group as they fought with Bovell to conjure up a radical-primitive, black-white, mud-children's punky reggae. But it's nonsense. Sherwood's made some great records in his little art ghetto, but they tend to cling around quite a safe species of daring. He works with highly disciplined backing players, entering his favoured chaos at the mixing desk. The Pop Group were smart enough to allow Bovell — well-practised in the chart-bound wiles of *Lover's Rock*, reggae's brilliant bubblegum — to make a structure from whatever they came up with. Then they let themselves go as wild — deranged, distorted, brink-running — as they possibly could (it's greatest achievement may have been to devise a context where Mark Stewart's wino-proprietor roar doesn't sound foolish "Don't call me porri!" That's all right, I had no intention to).

Bovell was as baffled by these hateful arty madmen as they were perhaps frustrated by him. While all instruments and voice are allowed to career through insouciant soundworlds large and small (to drop out, explode back in, balloon into

extreme distortion, flesh side to side), a groove is constantly, almost casually maintained, and maintained against The Pop Group's calls for freedom from all possible discipline. Every characteristic of bass, guitar, sax, piano, drums or shouting is suddenly, utterly changed from moment to moment — every characteristic, that is, except their *rhythmic* interrelationship. The one concession to the producer's own craftsman's pride results in a masterpiece of fragmenting terror, with its uniquely delicious sense of mutating perspective.

In ordinary rock, no conscious forebear exists apart perhaps from Zappa — whose approach is (as always) buried in a muck of 'ironic' jokes — and The Fall (most notably "Specter Vs Reich", recorded in 1978, a full year before *Y* and included on the second side of the great *Dragnet*). Both — with strong artistic logic — broke with the standard rock-mixage practice, which was to spend time corraling all varied textures and noises together into a single implied studio space (Pink Floyd spent countless bland millions achieving this in *Dark Side Of The Moon*). All three work consciously and consistently to undermine the notion of unity as a required artistic goal, the PG/Bovell project most of all, using its multiplicity to dramatise the limits of funk's 'on the one'.

In 1979, the battle was on to see if punk would take hold, or pass. The Pop Group wanted it to pass: they hated it, as an insufficiently radical movement obscuring — among other things — their own shining originality. Because punk was against production values and improvisation, the group were absolutely in favour of both. They talked about bebop, beatniks, Cage, Stockhausen, James Brown, Baudelaire — and total artistic control. They wanted to take the pissed-off among rock's audience and prance off together into a creatively noble, existential-political, electric jazz poetry (or some zone of similarly piffing arrogance). Studio electronics and judicious *musique concrete* tape edits should have been forced to confront raw body/funk, and raw body/funk to deal with free jazz. Except that once they'd crashed through the outer walls of punk prejudice, they fell, like many before them, for the notion that electric pop had nothing of consequence to bring to radical jazz. They had stopped listening to their own past: a reviewer had praised *Y* as a violent coming together of *On The Corner* and *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, but The Pop Group refused further exploration of either, and lost the chance to establish their world-historical contribution.

As to *Y*'s reconstitution as a CD, well sadly, the indescribably odd belch that formerly opened proceedings now occurs after the slightly laboured (though magnificently titled) "She Is Beyond Good And Evil" ("Western values mean nothing to her"), the single added to the LP. A slight adjustment from the original vinyl running order doesn't solve the original release's one failing: that towards the end of side two, energy flagged. The naggingly grabby little riffs dissipate a little too often into freeform ambience, and despite fabulous individual moments, even Bovell can't stay enough considered intelligence into the greenings-card angst: "Nothing is impossible when you're living on the brink." We fear what we do not understand. "Please don't sell your dreams!" The next record would be *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?*, the sort of priggish hustle that turned people into Haurat 100, for better funking, and a more humane worldview.

MARK SIMNER

saxophonist Takagaki wasn't much good, and the session hasn't worn well, which makes it difficult to recommend to a new audience. Togashi's career as a free drummer came close to being curtailed by a crippling accident in the same year (1969) as he made *Isolation*, but he's recorded intermittently ever since, and the two live Paris albums were out there on a 1979 visit.

His patterning percussion — on traps, cymbals and gongs, with nothing very

exotic in the lot — seems to comment on the playing of the other musicians rather than specifically interacting with them. On the two July 79 dates recorded here, he played with Charlie Haden and Don Cherry, the results coming close to the music of the Codona records that Cherry made with Nana Vasconcelos and Colin Walcott in the 80s. Haden's Earth-father bass has more energy than he's shown of late, but it's the sly, swerving sound of Cherry's

trumpet that is the distinctive element. When he puts that down and picks up the bamboo flute, the music squatters off into the sort of inconsequentiality that always plagued his career.

I prefer the other date, though, where Togashi worked with Takashi Kato (piano), Albert Mangelsdorff (trombone) and JJ Jenney-Clark (bass). Little enough of Mangelsdorff's free jazz work is in circulation to make any document worthwhile, and the peppery dialogue he

creates with what is an almost classically-styled group amounts to a personal synthesis of free pop methodology: funny, sharp, spontaneous. Jenney-Clark is a virtuoso and Kato belabors in Togashi's writing amounts to gestures and sketches and one can't really say if Japanese roots make a contribution to the sonic on hand. But the records have their own quiet, detailed character, something of a world away from *Isolation*, and it's

agreeable to make their acquaintance the second time around

RICHARD COOK

Erkki-Sven Tüür

Crystallisation

ECM NEW SERIES ECM 1500 CD

Erkki-Sven Tüür was one of the stars of Nonesuch's Estonian Experience album, which featured three of his precocious pieces from the 80s. This record demonstrates his dazzling compositional skills to a much greater extent, from the jagged construction of *Passion* (also of pop-single length with a trick ending—fantastic), to the accomplished flute writing and interwoven electronics of the title track, and the simple upwards momentum of *Passion*. Despite the technique on display, a good part of Tüür's appeal lies in the simplicity of his dramatic devices. He's not afraid to take one good idea, stick to it and develop it with the resources at his disposal.

Yet on the longest piece, *Requiem in Memoriam Preetor Uje*, for soprano, tenor, mixed choir, triangle, piano and strings, he has created an extended work that evokes several eras of 20th-century classical music without self-consciousness or pastiche. Tüür's *Requiem* flows with the majestic logic and crafted structure of a *Faust* Towers episode. A wild card element—the disruptive piano part—prevents it becoming too portentous without losing the gravity of the work's purpose.

We may see some extravagant claims for Tüür as a synthesiser of warring factions, a great healer for the end of this troubled century. If it helps him sell records that's fine, but he sounds like a practical man rather than a millennial guru. And he doesn't have a beard. Born the same year (1959) as Morrissey and pianist Alex Maguire, Tüür has clearly put the intervening time, studying, listening, playing in a "chamber rock" group, to good use.

If Tüür is a credit to Estonian educators, so are the performers. The Tallinn Chamber Orchestra with the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste. The instrumentation (string orchestra, soloists, choir for *Requiem*) works well in the concert hall acoustic, aided by some careful mixing from Jan Erik Kongshaug. The soloists are highlighted well and the choir sounds gorgeous. *Architectonics VI*

(1992) feels less assured than the slightly later pieces that take up the rest of the album. Tüür seems to have hit a winning streak since he gave up

teaching to concentrate on composing. His confident style may come from good, frequent, accurate performances. Perhaps he's just bloody good—exactly how good may take a little more time to figure out. Recommended

JOHN L. WALTERS

Various Artists

Artcore 2

REACT REACT 75 2CD/2LP

Various Artists

Nu Skool Flava

SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND SOUT 006

CD/2LP

In a world of a thousand "essential" drum 'n' bass compilations, *Artcore 2* is one which genuinely deserves the epithet. Last year's *Artcore 1* helped codify notions of "Intelligent Jungle/drum 'n' bass" as a distinct entity from Hardstep. This second volume continues charting new developments, though "progressive" seems to have become the new tag in 1996. Not that a single style of music is represented on *Artcore 2*, which pretty much reflects the broad spectrum of cutting-edge music being dropped by DJs like Doc Scott and LTJ Bukem in such London clubs as Materialheadz and Speed over the past year or so. Anyone who's found drum 'n' bass's sounds more ambient incarnations a little boring (let's face it, a lot of it is getting pretty tepid) should check Nemetron's amazing "Another Dream World", or the bipolar, streamlined finish of Alex Reece's remix of Cool Breeze's "Can't Deal With This" for evidence that these styles do have something to say. The rest of the mix ranges from the racing 1970s fusion synth-washes of Adam P's delicious "Circles" and The Ballistic Brothers' "Fly Away", to the bleak, metallic dubscapes of Doc Scott's "Drumz 95" and DJ Trace's remix of T-Power's "Mutant". Between these extremes sit unique sounds which I'd be foolish to try to fit in any category. Foul Play's classic "Total Control", Opical's strange "Sleepless" replete with its bizarre saxophone sample, and Skanna's "Find Me", an intriguing nod to Africa. Special mention to rising star J. Maik, whose

track (mimicked "Lush Life" here) is one of several restless, abstract and wholly engrossing mixes he's put out lately.

SOUR's Nu Skool Flava charts recent developments within the Hardstep lineage, which, though it may have fallen out of critical favour over the past year, still packs out the arenas. Hardstep's warped basses, head-bobbing snares and "bad boy" vocal scratches are retained, the new "flava" brings less a radical break with tradition than a move away from ragga towards HipHop colours and inflections. The collection is dominated by DJ Trace in various guises, currently one of the most forward-reaching producers of harder-style drum 'n' bass. "This Style" and "Hit Me Dead" carry some menacing urban weight but lack the mysterious sense of acceleration which characterised his recent and brilliant *Dee Jay 12's*. *Mixes* by Shy FX, MC Del and a neat L Double mix of Elizabeth Troy's "Let Me Be" also make this collection well worth hearing. But by the end of the CD the music's relentless journey to the darkness has taken its toll on this listener.

RICHARD SCOTT

Various Artists

The History Of Space Age Pop Volume 1: Melodies And Muschief

RCA DT863 86645 CD

Various Artists

Volume 2: Mallets In Wonderland

RCA DT863 86646 CD

Various Artists

Volume 3: The Stereo Action Dimension

RCA DT863 86647 CD

As a child growing up in the suburbs of New York City at the dawn of the British invasion of American pop music, the dominant mass tune of square adults was known as Easy Listening. In my area, FM stations like WPAT, WFRN and WIFM played lush instrumental versions of mostly show tunes with the occasional current pop tune that fitted the rigidly melodic format. The forests of strings nurtured by Mantovani and Percy Faith were the canvas onto which The Beatles and Rolling Stones sowed their Pollock-like drops of drum thuds, Chuck Berry guitar riffs and garbled vocals. No

wonder my parents were upset by the whelping sounds emitting from my six-transistor radio.

Easy Listening as a concept has never gone away, its successors are the gurgling brook concoctions of the Windham Hill label and that vast chasm called New Age. Now, much to my surprise, the ut-square offerings of Enoch Light, The Guitars Unlimited and The Three Suns have been rechristened "Space Age Bachelor Pad Music" and have found a new audience among fans of neo-lounge acts like The Gentle People, Combustible Edison and, of course, The Pike Flowers Pops Orchestra.

The History Of Space Age Pop is a three-volume examination of some of the more "musical" moments of the genre. Conceived, compiled and annotated by trash-culture guru Iwan Chud—us the Dr Frankenstein responsible for the musical rehabilitation of that ultimate space age bachelor Esquivel—these CDs take the listener to a strange planet filled with the sounds of log drums, ocarinas and Farfisa organs deconstructing pop standards in often exaggerated stereo separation.

The folks who bought this stuff back then were less concerned with the musicality of the records than they were with the sonic experience provided by Dick Schory's Percussion And Brass Ensemble—one of the many studio orchestras represented on this anthology. Stereo players were just arriving on the market and many a grown man could be brought to child-like wonder by the extreme stereo separation of Esquivel's music (who recorded his orchestra in two studios simultaneously to ensure the widest possible separation). The core sound of space age pop was that of sweet swing bands and popular Latin orchestras such as Perez Prado's—that is, the music, that a thirteenth-century adult in the early 60s grew up with. Top-flight studio musicians such as Shelly Manne, Don Lamond and Larry Barker worked on these sessions, and the enthusiastic playing indicates that making these sort of records was a choice *big*.

The Stereo Action Dimension CD is of most significant current interest. "Stereo Action" RCA told listeners, "is musical movement so real your eyes will follow the sound." A leap over stereo demonstration records of trains and

soundcheck

ping-pong matches, Stereo Action made extreme use of stereo panning: the trombones and mantras seem to bounce between speakers. What is remarkable is that all of this music was recorded live onto three-track recording machines. Bernie Green And His Orchestra's 1961 concept album *Future* asked the musical question, "What will popular music sound like in 1970?" Stereo Action Dimension offers Bernie's version of "Under Paris Skies," featuring an odd electronic device called a Tonalyser, as a hint of a future that would sound remarkably like 1961.

The fascination with the studio that the endlessly brilliant arrangers of *Space Age Pop* demonstrated anticipated the innovations of George Martin and Brian Wilson, among others, and *Space Age Pop*'s obsession with sound and space makes it the Ambient music of its era OK, maybe it's only sonic wallpaper, but it's a kind of silk more sonic wallpaper that has lasted remarkably well after decades stored away in the cultural closet.

JOEL LEWIS

Various Artists

The Meridian Crossings

HERMIT FOUNDATION AV 0078 2 931 CD

This is a document of the fourth Hermit Symposium, held last summer at the Play Monastery in the Czech Republic. The Hermit festivals brought together artists and musicians for performances and site-specific artworks in various spaces in and around the monastery building. A shortage of funding means that it was probably the last such event, which is a shame because it's produced some impressive work. Past events have brought Czech performers together with well-known experimenters including Phil Niblock, ROVA Saxophone Quartet and Peter Cusack. There's a slightly Cuedo-ish feel to the CD line-up listing — Tim Hodgkinson and Jim Meneses, with slide guitar and percussion in the relectory — but the main impression of mystery lies in the spacey acoustic of the buildings used.

It's not apparent whether there was any gauding theme to last year's happenings, but there is certainly a sense of overall orientation to the CD's quite disparate events which suggests some kind of common set of objectives. There's strong work from previously

unfamiliar (to me anyway) musicians such as percussionist Pavel Fajt and cellist Vojtech Havel. The former contributes a surging piece which is a kind of tuned Jaki Liebezelt, and the latter a haunting two minute miniature. Also striking are the two performances featuring Tim Hodgkinson. However, singing out particular moments seems to run counter to the spirit of the project and its dedication to the exploration of acoustics. It's unusual for the sound of a place to work in such a way, but this had the effect of a sun-sea-sand photo in winter. I wanted to be there.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Various Artists

Offbeat: A Red Hot Soundtrip

WAX TRAX/TVT THT 7238 CD

Offbeat, the latest in the Red Hot series of AIDS benefit albums, is thematically organized around a rather dubious connection. The disc's premise is that the new school of sampladelic collage is the artistic inheritor of the legacy of 50s Beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso. Thankfully, the exploit links between the music and the promotional concert are confined to a William S. Burroughs sample, David Byrne reading Kerouac, and Amn Baraka's thorny, post-Beat poem "Black Dada Nihilismus", set to a backing by DJ Spooky.

Unfortunately, as is typical of the Red Hot records, the line-up — which also includes DJ Krush, Laika, Tortoise, Skylob, Barry Adamson and Ben Neill — promises more than it delivers. What looks like lots of new Skylob material on the sleeve turns out to be interesting, but insubstantial, interludes by Mat Ducasse. Tortoise's contribution, "Wat", is a lumbering, homunculus of a groove, while Krush's "Ryu-Ki" loads the polished atmospheres that make his turntable abstractions effective. American Music Club's Mark Eitzel's collaboration with My Bloody Valentine, and Soul Coughing's "Murder Of Lawyers", represent the worst excesses of post-Beat spoken word performance: 'open mic night' poetry set to loopy music.

Much more successful are Laika's "Looking For The Jackalope", which continues the funky deconstruction of 1994's *Silver Apples Of The Moon*, and Barry Adamson's examination of cool on "Hip No Therapy". The meeting of Meat

Beat Manifesto and Emergency Broadcast Network on EBN's recent *Telecommunication Breakdown* bears fruit here as well. EBN's "Characteristic Beat" is an oblique, out-of-kilter "Dance To The Music" for the post-sampling age, while MB's "I Control (Audio Collage #2)" is a typically dense and claustrophobic mélange of booming bass and vocal samples dealing with power and domination.

With the exception of "I Control" and DJ Spooky's "Temporarily Displaced", there is nothing explicitly political on the record, as the Red Hot Organization



tends to shy away from confrontation. But that is just what would make this album work, both artistically and politically.

PETER SHAPIRO

Various Artists

Rumours Room Volume 1

NINEBAR RECORDS NOZZED 1 CD LP

Somewhere on the collaged insert of Throbbing Gristle's *Second Annual Report* is a smudged quotation scavenged from the popular press of the day: "It isn't punk rock. It isn't anything you could name." The still-nascent quartet's toes must have curled with pleasure at the media's (admittedly short-lived) inability to pigeonhole their activities — eluding categorisation has always been a deep-seated impulse for musicians hoping to substantiate their claim to originality. Until the last decade, the final refuge was in extremity. Whitehouse's (or Merzbow's) trinitus-inducing slabs of thinking awfulness stand like monumental refusals, mute denials, dumb insolence of the highest stripe.

Post-House dance culture has turned its back on sonic violence, though, and substituted a kind of fractal cross-fertilisation, endlessly weaving lines of

influence to create an array of microgenres for which there are no names — and so escaping categorisation by slipping through the net of language rather than tearing it apart. At London's Rumpus Room, clubgoers can experience this process in action. An array of guest DJs blend elements of sound like *Des Essences* in the perfume lab, momentarily capturing evanescent moods before shifting to some half-magined lateral collorary. Like all improvisation, this process happens on the border between intrusion and self-indulgence, and the collection of specially-produced tracks which make up this two-hour journey lie scattered on both sides of the line.

This music lies in the hinterland between Artificial Intelligence Techno, abstract drum 'n' bass and nodding-head TripHop, taking elements from all these areas to create something which is often tantalisingly new. A case in point is Jake Szazenger's "Toronto", which sets together a jazz drum break, a warm double bass loop and simple piano arpeggios, and then ushers them along with fibrillating Hardstep patterns more textural than rhythmic and which get more and more daring without ever feeling ostentatious. Better still is Dirty Beatnik's "Perfect Rhyme", where choppy guitar riffs and time-warped brass crescendos are bolstered by a rolling funk rhythm which features some gloriously crunchy ride cymbals. This lesson groove is then torn apart by tumbling, spastic bursts of Jungle, and healed with quietly ascending Bleep's Seven synth noises.

The inevitable moments of musical dullness are the result of the patent commonwealth that made this music possible — but with a supporting cast which features T Power, DJ Food, Scanner and the wonderful if unheeded HalDr Rocker, they are few and far between. And if the mood of restrained introspection gets too much, you can always flip to Repeat's shaming "Close" where the rubbery loops of white noise sound like Suicide on amyl nitrate, and the huge mutant steam train noises drag *Pixel Machine* Music into the disco for one last apocalyptic maybe. Maybe club culture still has a place for extremity, after all.

CHRIS SHARP



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Is there new music in Denmark? But if there isn't, would Evan Parker mess about with amateurs? "Ghost-in-the-machine" was formed in 1987. Since that time many a famous musician has played and toured with the group: John Tchicai, Peter Brotzmann, Florio Dorge, Paul Rutherford, etc. Recorded live during two concerts the group created 11 spontaneous compositions of totally unpredictable music. Duration - about 70 minutes.



LEO LAB CD 019 MOSCOW COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA featuring SANKHO NAMCHYLAK; AN ITALIAN LOVE AFFAIR

Recorded live at the Bolzano "Jazz Summer" Festival in June 1985 to the highest critical acclaim and standing ovation of the audience. The line-up of MCO reads like "who is who" in Russian new music. The leader of the MCO, however, is a bilingual Brit, Vladimir Miller, who writes the music and doubles as a conductor and a piano player. But aren't you curious to hear the Tuvan throat-singing Diva, Sankho Namchylak, with a big band?



LEO LAB CD 020 AMA JAZZ IN ONE BREATH

The most mysterious recording that reached Leo Records' quarters from the Urals (a mountain ridge that separates Europe from Asia). AMA stands for "Association of Musicians of Avers-gorge". AMA-JAZZ is a quartet (piano, sax, drums, et bass) that plays highly charged, powerful, passionate, intuitively structured music. They are of The Ganelin Trio school, and like The Trio in one past they will be compared to the Art Ensemble of Chicago. But make no mistake, they create a world of their own. Duration over 72 minutes.



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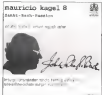
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soundcheck

David S Ware Quartet

David

HOMESTEAD RECORDS HPS230 CD

It is not much of a shock to learn that recognition came neither quickly nor easily to saxophonist David S. Ware. The safety nets under a career in free jazz are threadbare enough in Europe, but it sounds tougher in New York where this particular saxophonist, despite lengthy, high-profile periods with Cecil Taylor in the 70s and 80s, was driving a cab right up until 1994. But perhaps it's not all gloom and injustice — sometimes it takes time to grow into such enigmatic and finely-tuned music. Charles Gayle's weighty brilliance in his mid-fifties and the dimensions that Ware seems to have added to his approach since his Taylor days are evidence of this.

It was 1995's *Cryptology* that thrust Ware into the (still relatively dim) free jazz limelight. It was the saxophonist's debut on Homestead Records, a small American label with a loyal following honed on hardcore rock. The Homestead name meant that *Cryptology* got space in America's more mainstream music press, and to many, the contents were a revelation.

Dao, the follow-up, continues along similar lines. Ware's roots are set firmly in 60s soul, with the music of Ayler and late Coltrane as nourishment. If he is not as far out as Gayle, he is several steps further in that direction than David Murray, and mails both for intensity and imagination. The record's title is concerned with a form of Taoism, in which personality and rational intelligence are kept in abeyance, in order to release a more profound, intuitive, creative intelligence. Something very like this has been an unexpressed ideal within free music, since it began, but it remains easier to detect than explain. Dao does contain tunes, and they are excellent, in a stately, motif-made-grand, final period Coltrane kind of way. Dark and intense, "Rhythm Dao" rests on a snicker and cavernous, repeated piano figure from Matthew Ship's left hand, while Ware is turned along frantically by Whit Dickey's pulse-drumming. There is a chord sequence to "Dao Feet," a slow, hymn-like theme and possibly the most beautiful composition on the record. Ware and Ship work close to both each other and the

melody, and it is a masterpiece. But the densest moments come in the long "Dao Forms" and the final blow-out "Dao", where Dickey and virtuoso bassist William Parker turn up the heat on what is, despite great trumping power from Ware and fragile melodic hectoring from Ship, an almost magical musical relationship.

There is a well-deserved resurgence of interest in what is becoming more imaginatively known as 'ecstatic music' — which is surely a sign of its continuing relevance. Expect Ware's superb quartet to figure prominently in it.

LINDA CHISWICK

Randy Weston

Saga

VERVE 529 237 CD

The first notes of saxophonist Billy Harper's solo on the luxurious opening track make it clear that this one's a winner. The rest of the album is similarly authoritative. The combination of Weston's utterly distinctive piano soloing — roamy and incisive — and a set of killer tunes, both old and new, is irresistible. The seven-piece group sounds very full, and the percussionist neatly fills out Weston's looping, rolling rhythms. All this is helped by a strong

rhythm section of Billy Higgins on drums and a slapping, strumming Alex Blake on bass.

The clarity and economy of Weston's thinking is best heard in the two solo pieces, "Lagos" and "A Night in Miami". The latter is Weston bottled at source, with crystal clear left-hand lines and enigmatic runs from the right. He creates complexity with economy of expression: no outpourings, just the clarity of a lifetime's experience. In both cases there's a sense of newboldness about Weston's resources. It feels like he could go on and on tossing his tunes out into the commercial desert.

Various Artists

Sanskritik: A Celebration Of Music Of India

CENTRE OF INDIAN ARTS NO NUMBER BCD

Between 1970 and 1988, the Sanskritik festival presented what was probably the most extensive selection of Indian music and dance to be found outside the Indian subcontinent. The inaugural event was the first time that such a variety of Indian arts had been presented in concert in the UK, and the annual festival went on to receive wide critical and popular acclaim. Sanskritik (the word means 'arts and culture') was the work of Barendra Shankar, whose obsession has led to this remarkable eight CD set (available in boxes of two CDs per box) which presents ten hours of some of the finest performances from the concert series.

Indian music is of course based upon a different set of premises to Western classical music. The prizing of virtuosity and invention over mere reproduction of written musical parts, the preference of melody to harmony and counterpoint, are all reflected here in the performances, which include solos, duos and trios, existing groups and line-ups that spontaneously formed on tour. The innate quality of the recorded music extends also to the accompanying booklet, giving a well researched and informative history of the concerts, Indian music and instruments, an introduction to Indian music theory and biographies of the artists (no underachiever, Mr Shankar).

Among the many musical highlights is the amalgam of Northern and Southern styles which opens disc two, in which the melody is taken by vocal, flute, sitar and sarod in turn, each blending seamlessly into the next. Also noteworthy is the extraordinary musicianship of Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute) and Ghulam Jaffar Khan (sarangi) — in Indian classical music, the human voice is the ultimate musical instrument, the peak to which instrumentalists attempt to rise, and the playing of these two artists is at times almost indistinguishable from sounds produced by the human voicebox.

Artists taking part included stars of the time (Chaurasia, L. Subramaniam, Lakshmi Shankar) as well as those of subsequent renown (Partho Das, Mukul Mukherjee), and the music and recording are of a uniformly high standard (the dancers are sometimes audible in the form of jingling ankle bells, but this adds to rather than detracts from the musical performances).

Barendra Shankar is evidently a driven man, and a note of despair creeps through in his written notes. Sanskritik eventually foundered due to lack of financial support. But he is to be complimented on preserving such a richly varied selection of music that serves not only as a testimony to the fine performers involved in the series, but also as a stimulating introduction to the music of the Indian subcontinent.

MARTIN GORDON



PHOTO: ANDREW FORTREACH

"Sauter Eyes" is a tumultuous joy. Also riveting is "Jahika," a piece dedicated to the well-known musicians of Morocco's Rif mountains, which is surprisingly subdued given the subject matter (Weston has also performed and recorded with the Gnawa musicians of Marrakesh). Weston has made a lot of courageous music in his time, and this is a worthy addition to the catalogue. It seems wrong that the somewhat peripheral position he currently occupies probably has a lot to do with the self-imposed semi-exile that has so enriched his music.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Neil Young Dead Man, OST

VAPORWARRIORS 9362 46171 CD/MC

Keiji Haino The Book Of Eternity Set At Home

FORCED EXPOSURE FE 036 CD

When I hear the word Ambient I reach for my guitar. In the absence of a good new idea from the increasingly anemic Ambients in the electronic field, these two very different discs are reminders of just how great a generator of atmospheres a guitar can be. Haino and Young are two of the most physically overwhelming players alive, and both contrast the elemental force of feedback with searing lead counterpoint and high, yearning alto vocals.

Having said that, Young doesn't sing at all on this soundtrack for Jim Jarmusch's gothic Western *Dead Man*, and the films requirements restrain his impulse to let rip. Adopting Miles Davis's work method for his soundtrack to Louis Malle's *Le 7e Ciel* — watching the movie through three or four times and then improvising along with it — he has produced a set of starkly unsettling electric guitar primprimos pieces, married only by the deliberately (one presumes) artificial forked-tongue dialogue snippets, which, outside the film's context, impede more than they help the narrative of the soundtrack on disc. Only when the voices finally give us does the record really come into its own, when the muddy flow of guitar noises thickens, solidifies and then threatens to disintegrate, sending up sparks like the crackling of an isolated scrub fire in the desert night.

As the title implies, *The Book Of Eternity* Set At Home is also about immolation. But then, most all Keiji Haino's music is Eternity — consists of three uncommonly well recorded pieces — two for solo guitar, the middle one for an indeterminate soul-grinder of an instrument. On the guitar pieces Haino envelops himself in funeral shrouds of white noise, across which he simultaneously scrawls a last guitar testament. And he sings in a voice so desolately lonely, it all but suggests he has no place in this world or the next. Or alternately, he sucks up a voice from the pit of his being as if he were trying to rid his body of some irredeemable foulness. In either case, he sounds like he can't wait for his guitar's purifying flames to purge his existence.

Fortunately for his admirers, Haino is condemned, like Prometheus, to play out this scenario over and over, for all eternity.

BIBA KOPF

John Zorn First Recordings

TSADIK TSD304 CD

John Zorn The Book Of Heads

TSADIK TSD309 CD

John Zorn Redbird

TSADIK TSD308 CD

One moment from a million to sum up whatever it is that John Zorn does: Naked City's version of Ornette's "Lonely Woman," the group squeezing every last drop of melancholy out of the melody while Fred Frith trots out the bassline from Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman." Pure Cage, of course, two pieces of music slapped together on the happenstance of their similar titles. Three generations of musicians have grown up on the idea of John Cage, but has anyone ever taken Cage to heart as seriously as Zorn? And with such consistently alarming, hilarious or moving results?

Zorn's latest label venture, Tsadik, is yet another outlet for his (and his fellow travelers') unmarginally poetic output. It's also a fine index of Zorn's attitudes to the business of making music (and making it available). Each record demonstrates a paradigmatic attention

to detail, from the recording through to the consistently superb packaging, yet Zorn refuses to play the industry game at all (no promotion, no publicity). Which is admirable, of course, but frustrating, these three records will go largely undiscovered by all but diehard fans, yet they each add to the picture of Zorn as one of the most important American composers since Cage.

The most intriguing record here, though perhaps by definition the least important musically is *First Recordings*. Released as part of Tsadik's Archival Series, the album is a collection of five pieces recorded by Zorn as a 19 and 20 year old. The central piece is the three-part "Mikhal Zoetrope", described by Zorn in the unusually illuminating sleeve notes as "the crassest piece I'd ever written". A jump-cutting collage of discrete sound moments — shrieked vocals, extended-technique soprano playing, clattering pots and pans — it's certainly some kind of blueprint for themes which recur in his work, and with its nods to Cage and particularly Kagel, it's pretty remarkable for the work of an adolescent.

Elsewhere, "Conquest Of Mexico" and "Variations On A Theme By Albert Ayler/Requiem For Albert" are daring slices of musique concrete, with astonishing sheets of echoing sound, painstakingly created in what I assume were pretty crude conditions. And "Automata Of Al-Jarzan", with its samples from film noir and sci-fi soundtracks, points to other routes he would take. Overall, *First Recordings* is a fascinating — and touching — portrait of a young musician first becoming aware of his prodigious ability, and in the process coming to terms with what Zorn himself terms his "sad lonely life of self-imposed alienation and exile".

First Recordings's slightest track "Wind Kola", an amusingly ham-fisted guitar and vocal piece, finds curious echoes in *The Book Of Heads*, a solo guitar piece written in 1978 for Eugene Chadbourne, and recorded here for Tsadik's Composer Series by Marc Ribot. With the piece, Zorn set out to recreate the language of improvising guitarists such as Fred Frith and Derek Bailey, writing music which embraced those players' extended techniques. God only knows what the resulting score looked like on paper. Reviewing Harris, Zorn's recent live CD with Derek Bailey and William Parker (*The Wire* 144), David

Toop commented on Bailey's ability to "realise, develop and move through sound fragments and interactive possibilities with equal intensity and precise intention". Zorn's 35 studies — played here with astounding virtuosity by Ribot — demonstrate Zorn's deep understanding of that ability and of the language of Improv generally.

The best of these three CDs, and certainly the most confounding, is *Redbird*: a chamber piece dedicated to artist Agnes Martin. The two parts — a bass drum solo played by Jim Pughese, and a quartet for harp, viola, cello and percussion — represent a bleak, if shadowy, minimalism not often associated with Zorn. Sure, albums such as *Aspirin* and *Long Tote* have ventured into minimalism, but there's a calm here that recalls the European Holy Minimalists, the drum piece "Dark River" in particular is a direct homage to Arvo Pärt's *Sarav* Was 90 Years Old.

None of these records qualifies as an example of Zorn's best work — although *Redbird* is certainly a breakthrough piece — but together they offer further glimpses into the world of an increasingly under-represented and misunderstood part of contemporary music.

SIMON HOPKINS

in brief critical beats

Peter Shapiro wheels up the latest avant dance tunes

Rhys Chatham & Martin Wheeler

NEEDS HTRK HTRK 15 CD 127 The intermittently brilliant Coldcut strike again with the inspired release on their N'Tone imprint of this bewildering record from NYC guitar-symphonist Rhys Chatham. Ethnic percussion collides with agit-funk beats and white noise found sounds. The star of the show, though, is Chatham's overloaded electronic trumpet, which sounds, unsurprisingly, like Peter Dinklage at his wildest. The sound of the Fourth World breaking through its barriers

Earl Grey Earl's Groove

AUGUSTO WHM, AUGUSTO 16 127 As Golde's recent tour proved, drum 'n' bass with live instrumentation is a perilous mixture. It works here on "I'm In Love

Cassandra Wilson

New Moon Daughter

BLUE NOTE CDP 7243 8 37183 CD

New Moon Daughter is both a continuation of, and progression from, 1993's superb *Blue Light: To Dawn*. While still retaining the production guidance of Craig Street, singer Cassandra Wilson moves away from the purely acoustic environment of that earlier album, introducing limited electric instrumentation into the proceedings. The result, at times, and particularly on Son House's "Death Letter," is a kind of Ambient blues, reminiscent of Daniel Lanois's production work on Robbie Robertson's self-titled solo album and The Neville Brothers' *Yellow Moon*.

Wilson's own compositions show her maturing rapidly as a songwriter and arranger, particularly "Solomon's Song," with its cool sense of ironic narrative detachment reminiscent of Hayro-period Joni Mitchell, and "Memphis," which locates the Afrocentric tradition that lies at the heart of the blues.

Her choice of others' material is considerably more varied and adventurous than *Blue Light*. It comes as little surprise to see "Strange Fruit," Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark" and Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome, I Could Cry" all included here. Much more interesting are her forays into the world of pop, drawn from various points over the last 30 years. Her understated emotional and tonal range on U2's "Love Is Blindness" renders Bono's self-conscious postmodernism obsolete in under five minutes. Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" is shorn of the original's self-confidence, reconstructed here as an atmospheric study of tremulous uncertainty. Most audacious of all is her treatment of The Monkees' "Last Train To Clarksville," transformed from a jangly archetype of 60s throwaway pop into a dark, slow-burning story of impending emotional loss.

As on *Blue Light*, however, it's a Robert Johnson song that most clearly demonstrates the sheer power of Wilson's voice.

Her version of "32-20", delivered in the kind of quavering tones that spell failing self-control, and accompanied only by a lone guitar and assortment of percussive household objects, places the listener right in the middle of this domestic tale of infidelity and revenge. This ability to guide the listener right to the very heart of a song and allow them to experience it almost subjectively is Cassandra Wilson's particular talent, and one that she consistently exercises on this record. Outstanding

PETER MCINTYRE

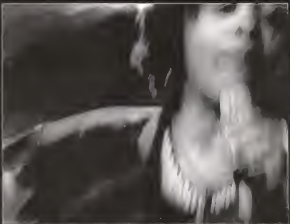


PHOTO ANDREW POTTS/ART

With You", though, because the purposeful intensity of the drum break tears through the gossamer daintiness of the jazz licks. "Earl's Groove", on the other hand, is a successful fusion of drum 'n' bass with the rhythms, rather than the tone colour, of Detroit Techno's synth riffs.

Morgan Geist Etrymon EP

HYPERMUSIC HYT60 270 12 Space

DJz Near Myths INFANT ARCADE 10

Two Techno artists that haven't forgotten that "Planet Rock" and "Strings Of Life" hit as hard rhythmically as they did texturally. New Jerseyite Morgan Geist's 12" is thoroughly generic, but nails every convention on the head. For someone whose first exposure to electronic music was probably Devo, Geist's beats are remarkably full of HipHop's boom-bust.

As Space DJz, Bandalu's Jamie Bessime and Ben Long share the same turf with Geist, only with more straight-ahead 4/4 gusto. With the undeniability of "Erratic's" 909 whomp, though, you'd never notice.

James Hardway Cool Jazz

MOTHER FUCKER EP RECORDINGS OF

SUBSTANCE MEMP 1 12" Yes, another

attempted reprise of the myths of the

cool jazz outlaw riding atop the new

sound of the underground. Remarkably,

it's not nearly as bad as you'd think.

There are some nice Middle Eastern

samples and the jazzy bits slur in the

right places, but, aside from his image,

Hardway's problem is that his breaks

don't groove. Their brittleness works on

the first side as ambience, but without

jump-up dynamics they become a bit

tedious on side two.

J Majik Apache NEW SPACED

12" Apparently a deconstruction of the

most famous HiHop break of them all,

Incredible Bongo Band's "Apache", this

eschews the dancefloor altogether. With

all manner of backwards percussion and

clipped drum rolls, this makes no

concomitant gestures to melody.

Disconcerting, unsettling and stark,

"Apache" exists solely at the low end of

the spectrum.

Octagon Man The

Rumm/Phonic Maze subsonic

WOUNDS FROM 12" Blissfully free of the

doggy pomkunk-fu flick masculinity of

his releases as Depth Charge, J. Saul

Kane's latest Octagon Man release is

the best thing he's ever done. "The

Rumm" is straight-ahead, blistering,

contemporary Electro, reminiscent of

Plastikman in its ferocity, technological

breakdown "Phonic Maze" is a startling,

gritty fusion/fusion of Jungle, Electro and

funk with drum breaks that do just that.

Steel Heavy Listening EP MULT

PLATEAUX PP21 12" With his disco-

sampling recordings as Subsonic 808,

Biocho C proves that the implied

radicalism of Industrial Electronica still

translates when welded to the funk.

Here, as Steel, he forgoes Chic and

Jimmy 'Bo' Horne in favour of a darker,

colder, more brooding rhythm whose

sense of groove is still miles ahead of

most artists mining similar territory.

However, the title track, his contribution

to Electronica's fascination with Easy

Listening, is less convincing.

T Power Police State soul

TRONIC CO Potentially sub-titled

"Prospects For Democracy", this fusion

of Techno and drum 'n' bass was apparently partially inspired by Noam Chomsky. Which makes sense because, just like Chomsky's unrelenting, facile radicalism, "Police State" is bludgeoningly single-minded and overbearing pleasure-free. Typical of an autodidact, T Power is unaware of his own contradictions: his music is as stilet as his imagined dystopia, which doesn't mean that his art mirrors reality, but that he's trapped inside his own head.

Tortoise [Jayed (UNKLE) Remux] CITY SLANG PROMO 12" UNKLE's Tim Goldsworthy appropriately edits the loam-limbed meandering of the 20 minute-plus original (which appeared on Tortoise's recent *Millions Now Living* album) into an intense, beat-heavy drone. A skeletal groove — fashioned from a martial drum break and a rigid baseline strangely reminiscent of New Order's "Blue Monday" — holds everything together to create an exploration of space and abstraction for more convincing and enjoyable than the original.

Various Artists Back To Basics Cut The Crap BACK TO BASICS (BFI) 333333 A smart trophy in honour of the fifth anniversary of the Leeds club. The most immediately eye-catching contribution is Andrew Weatherall's interpretation of the down-tempo groove. Always better at working over other people's music than he is on his own, Weatherall turns in a mean, onerous mix that encompasses his own Two Swordsman project. Skylab, Wagon Christ and Atika Blues. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Chicagoan Derrick Carter's unbribeable hedonism. Unless Larry Levan is reincarnated, Carter's mix is as good a summing up of disco's eternal pleasure principle as you're ever likely to hear.

Various Artists Further Thoughts And Freedoms FIFTH FREEDOM FIVE 005 12" This EP of remakes from porno Calvin Bush's Fifth Freedom label moves from the gorgeous, slow-burn Techno of Bonarr's remix of Move D's "Soap Bubbles" to Kush's excellent, moody, hip-hop reconstruction of Paul Hunter's "Drop The Joint". In between are pleasant enough Techno-fusion excursions from Russ Gabriel and Sierac which help incessantly on the done-to-death cyber-soul riff.

Various Artists Ninja Guts Filocentralism... The Joy Of DEX NINJA TUNE JEN 22 2003/19 An excellent overview of the joys, pitfalls and prettles of down-tempo funk. Ranging from the tired beatnik jazz clichés of Funk Porcini's "Venus" to the hyperactive rhythm and detoured samples of Coldcut's brilliant "Atomic Moog 2000", the *Joy Of Dex* replays the feld fog, bad puns and occasional ephphay of a stoner's life. Unlike most Triphop that tries to be funny when not obsessed with its po-faced hipness, the bad jokes here, like "Atomic Moog 2000" and Kruder & Dorfmeister's "Shekatokadobub", are backed up by great music. The ephphay is Wagon Christ's magnificent remix of Two Player's "Extreme Possibilities".

Wishmountain [Radio UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE 110001 12"] Dr Rockit D For Doctor EP CLEAR CL 814 12" These two new-now releases by Matt Herbert are grating and abrasive not because of the scraping sounds or his much-waunted use of kitchen utensils as instruments, but because the guy just thinks he's so clever. With its novelty effects, "Radio" is as annoying in its quest for attention as a precocious child laid trying to prove himself, while the Dr Rockit release is panmorous and tight-fisted with its quasi-Electro phonic. Experimentation is not an excuse for a lack of swing.

Witchman The Shape Of Rage EP LEE DOCK 4 12" With a slightly broader sense, palette than run-of-the-mill Triphop, "4 AM On Point" is more evocative, though no less sultry. Although "Levathair" and "Cfword" are both empathetic in their breath and scope, neither in the realm of the drum 'n' bass epic, they aren't engaging at all. Like Matt Herbert, Witchman's John Rhome seems to be doing nothing but showing off.

in brief out rock

Tom Ridge hears the buzz from the post-rock firmament

Gate Live in Boston, NYC 1994 ROOM VILLAGE PVT 12" **Total** Tanazmawik Dem Renaissance FREEK RECORDS RAG 17 CD First up giving his guitar a good seeing-to is Lee

Ronaldo, appearing alongside mates Michael Morley and Zeena Parkins as Gate. A live recording of Ronaldo and Morley improvising for 30 minutes in Boston dominates this release, and it's fearsome stuff: loud, unrelenting white guitar noise. It does have a kind of mesmerizing quality once you get beyond the bludgeoning monotony. Set against this gargantuan display of guitar primitivism, the remaining six tracks are slight affairs, with Zeena Parkins's electric harp struggling to be heard over the slabs of abstract guitar noise. Total share some of Gate's qualities — exploring the ugly, hallucinatory extremes of the electric guitar — but touch base more frequently, so that there are more recognizable elements at work in their overall sound, with percussion and extended drone patterns adding to the sheet-metal guitar. "Receiving Mental Arrows" possibly overstates the case with a sound like an amplified dentist's drill, but the extended "Srebrenica Forest Glade" is more low-key, with fuzzy, intertwining guitars reaching a sustained rage-rock intensity.

The Grifters Am't My Lookout SUB POP 331 CD **Steve Westfield & The Slow Band** Project Me First HANDCRAFTED PUNK 1 CD 1994 Two releases representing the flipside of current Stateside trad-rock as peddled by the likes of Hootie And The Blowfish and The Spin Doctors. The Grifters and Steve Westfield are similarly bound by the unwritten rules of American rock 'n' roll, but manage to transcend the dead air of pervasive politeness and muso-boogie by injecting a little guts into the mix. The Grifters maintain an uncertain edginess by taking the Grunge staple of soft-hard dynamics and going off on unexpected musical tangents. This, plus an obvious musical debt to Alex Chilton, makes for occasionally thrilling listening. "Day Shift" and "The Straight Time" have late-period Big Star's imminent disintegration vibe, and "Radio City Suicide" pulls out all the stops, complete with anguished screams. Steve Westfield manages to play sincere alternative Country rock while smilingly threatening to undermine it. Ostensibly it sounds like Leonard Cohen backed by Crazy Horse, but there are some eccentric instrumental interludes — particularly some funky horns in unexpected places

— and a tendency to throw in unlikely fuzzy guitar wig-outs. There's nothing really new going on here, but *Project Me* injects a bit of vitality into an essentially conservative area in the much the same way as Palace.

King Loser You Cannot Kill What Does Not Live RHYM NUK N 300 CD Greasy, mutant rhythms and blues with psychedelic guitar tendencies, all filtered through a very drop-dead cool attitude. There's an impeccable cover of Tim Rose's "Morning Dew" where King Loser's Chris and Clare duet with all the sleazy melodrama of Nick Cave's recent out, "Shake Yr Wings" and "You Follow" are pulsating Stages-styled numbers with tremulous organ and bursts of psychedelic guitar. Anything, it seems, is up for grabs — even "Horror" (which ought to be well past its sell-by date) is given a fast and furious makeover. There is evidence of a surfeit of ideas and consequently the album tends to drift a little by its final third, but when King Loser's formidable energies are focused they sound electrifying.

The Magnetic Fields Cret Loast Strains Set 003 CD More of Stephen Merritt's richly melodic electro-folk songs, this time without a unifying theme, and with more conspicuous musical embellishment. The opening "With Whom To Dance" is a slow waltz with ukulele accompaniment. "When You Are Old And Lonely" is driven by low-key guitar and is quietly graceful. In between these songs there's a lot of tuneful but somehow less remarkable material. Unlike the preceding *Chrom Qf The Highway Song* — essentially a collection of road songs — much of the music on *Get Lost* seems overstated. "You And Me And The Moon" and "The Desperate Things You Made Me Do" are very busy sounding synth-pop songs. Merritt's way with hooklines and the richness of his voice are undeniable, but this album lacks a proper centre and relies too much on surface gloss.

Mile Wide Mile Wide UNKLE 800000 UNKLE V 002 CD **Twerdocleeb** Cbaski Flary INACQUIN PRODUCTIONS 18 CD Beethorn meets Pavement behind the art school bikeheads. Mile Wide are trying a bit too hard to give their competent but unremarkable lo-fi an arch postmodern

soundcheck

twist. Hence the gaggingly awful "Agenda March," the barely listenable "Weavershoss," and the toruously atonal "Plateau." A shame really, as the more straightforward instrumental tracks — "Dark Friends," "Terms Two" — aren't half bad in a kind of shambolic way. Mile Wide is, however, invaluable preparation for the nightmare that is Twerdacker's *Chalk Fairy*. This is a sort of semi-coherent, discordant racket, a cacophonous assortment of uneven rhythms which occasionally threaten to resolve themselves into something more streamlined but never do. To be fair, once you bridge the album's initial ugliness — deconstructed jazzcore perhaps — a kind of perverse internal logic is suggested by these clusters of antagonistic instrumentation, but it's not an easy journey. A muffled voice sample on track 11 says, "Fucking jerk, eat shit" — after playing this you may feel you've done just that.



Pell Mell *Interstate Flying Nun* (FLYING NUN 337 CD) **Polar Goldie Cats** *Polar Goldie Cats* (ESTATE PEACE 49 CD) *Slick* composition versus deliberate amateurism. Pell Mell's instrumental grooves glide by, occasionally veering on the sterile, while Polar Goldie Cats get as instrumentally loose as they can without actually falling apart. Neither are particularly striking, boxed-in by their respective styles, but while Polar Goldie Cats' faux-naïve incompetence soon begins to grate, there's a kind of serenity achieved by Pell Mell's smooth grooves which makes their take on alternative instrumental rock more rewarding — if unchallenging. There's the aura of an ongoing in-joke with hanging over Polar Goldie Cats, with their clumsy timekeeping, bum notes and track titles such as "Most Nibbels" and "Monster Dragg Dynamo." And a tendency to wear cardboard ears on stage.

Poem Rocket *Felix Culpa* (ICE ENTERTAINMENT POP 029 CD)

Third Eye Foundation

Semtex (COWBOY MUSIC NEW YORKERS) *Poem Rocket* peg their swirling guitar noises to fierce rhythms and fairly punchy songs. Their often frantic outpourings — rolling drums, lurching bass and jagged guitar riffs — evoke something of a post-punk feel. There are occasional studio effects — tape dropout, for example — but generally *Poem Rocket* sticks to a gloomy guitar rock format. There's the obligatory Velvet Underground homage in "Pretty Baby," but elsewhere there are echoes of The Birthday Party and even *Southern* and The Banshees' very BOs. *Third Eye Foundation*, on the other hand, launch into a guitar noiseldrum 'n' bass cross-pollination that sounds totally contemporary. Unfortunately, after the opening track "Sleep," the fruitful mingling of styles isn't really followed through and TEF stick to more obvious territory, already occupied by labelsmates Flying Saucer Attack. There are some interesting textures explored, particularly the dark-flavoured "Dreams On His Fingers" and the grandiose "Still Life," but they lack the initial sense of adventure and pace. The latter part of *Semtex* ushers in slower, more self-consciously "atmospheric" tracks that lack an inspirational spark.

in brief new classical

Andy Hamilton keeps score with recent modern composition CDs

Pierre Boulez *Pia Selon Pluivine Pour Cordes* (SOW CLASSICAL SHK 68 135 CD) As Paul Griffiths, author of *Modern Music And After*, has noted, recordings of the 'works of revolt' of the 50s and 60s await their date that were made closer to their date of composition will inevitably be more faithful to the composer's intention. *Pia Selon Pia* (*Fold By Folk*) is a classic of its time, and this 1969 recording by the composer with The BBC Symphony Orchestra is itself a classic. Based on poems by Stéphane Mallarmé, there are three vocal 'improvisations' — improvisations for the composer alone — surrounded by purely instrumental pieces. Boulez is meant to be a tough

listen, but the dazzling, indelcent orchestral colours and percussive sonorities have an immediate appeal. A masterpiece.

EARLE BROWN
MUSIC FOR PIANO(S) 1951-1995
DAVID ARDEN, PIANIST



Earle Brown *Music for Piano(s)* 1951-1995 (NEW ALBION MUSIC) *Alvin Curran* *Schiet Variations/For Cornelius/The Last Acts Of Julian Beck* (MOOSE 49 CD) Earle Brown was a member of the New York School of Cage and Morton Feldman, but his music has never been widely available on disc. This important collection, performed by David Arden, covers his output from *Three Pieces* of 1951 to *Summer Suite* 95 — both are premiere recordings. Brown, an exact contemporary of Feldman, was an early advocate of indeterminacy, and the results can be pretty dry. A limiting case of this is December 1951. Paul Griffiths reproduces the graphic score in *Modern Music And After*, the pianist somehow interpreting what looks like a geometric abstract print. Alvin Curran's piano music had a strong advocate in the late Yvonne Mitchell, known for her transcriptions of Nancarrow's player-piano studies. This 1968 recording (Yvonne died in 1993) is a memorial to two pianist-composers and, inevitably, to the pianist. The fluid *Schiet Variations* sounds like a notated improvisation. It's dedicated to Morton Feldman, who was reported in *The Wire* 136 as saying "Improvisation I don't buy it" — it lacks the calm inevitability of his own work. For Cornelius responds to the death of Cornelius Cardew, musical Maoist and creator of The Scratch Orchestra. It is, with deliberate irony, in the "antique, exquisitely bourgeois" form of the waltz. More accessible than the music of Earle Brown, but probably less enduring.

John Cage/Sylvano Bussotti *In A Landscape/Solo For Piano With Bussotti/Trom*

"Volterra" (MISO 90083 CD) **Terry Riley/Eddy De Fanti** *In A Landscape* (MISO 90070 CD) In *A Landscape* is early Cage, from 1948 — a gentle modal piece that gently rubs off on Italian avant gardist Sylvano Bussotti, increasingly alienated from European contemporaries Boulez and Stockhausen. Bussotti's *Volterra* (Avaria) dates from 1986-9, and suggests a well-known obsession of Messiaen's. But the two pieces from it included on this release are mostly delicate, the second is a captivating piano/bassoon duo. That unusual combination figures in the disc's closing piece by Cage, from after his adoption of chance technique and less moving as a result. It's one of an indefinite number of versions of *Concert For Piano And Orchestra* (1957-8). Paolo Carlini and Mauro Castellano give sensitive performances.

On the second of these two CDs, Eddy De Fanti's lightweight *Quempe* follows on from Terry Riley's early minimalist classic in C 60s 'systems music' sounds surprisingly naïve now, compared to what Reich and Adams achieved later. The performers make their own choices from 53 different motifs, producing an unpredictable yet totally monotonous phase-shifting effect. In this version, Ensemble Percussion Recerca use a combination of vibes, marimbas and xylophones, and the listener is left off lightly at only 41 minutes. Without the chemical aids to concentration of the hippy era, the music is hard to actually listen to.

Mauricio Kagel *Mauricio Kagel B. Saut-Bach-Passion* (AUNIS PORTUGAL 90 782044 CD) That's not 'The Mauricio Kagel Eight' in close harmony, just the eighth release in the formidable *Aunidis* series of the Argentinian composer's works. It is, in fact, a *Saint-Bach-Passion*, with the character of Bach taking the central speaking role in a remarkable postmodern *Passion* (this is blasphemy, I guess). Kagel is a surrealist with a serious purpose. A *Passion*, he says, "an evolution of suffering", and Bach is shown growling to his church employers, his genius restricted and unvalued. The music is a bizarre pot-pourri of styles, though avoiding direct quotation. The avant garde vocal techniques may

originate with Stockhausen, but this kind of theatrical event is unique to Kage's output

Anne LeBaron *The Musical Realism of Mode 42* (that is "realism" — just where the trans come in, I'm not sure. Maybe it's to do with the *EBO* Line. LeBaron's jazzy "electronic blues opera," a reinterpretation of the Orpheus/Eurydice legend from Eurydice's point of view. LeBaron plays Orpheus's instrument, or at least its modern version, and the plangent "Dog-Gone Cat Act" is a notated improvisation for prepared harp. The selections from her opera are played by some heavy-duty jazzers including Myra Helford, Fred Hopkins and Thurman Barker (the vocalists weren't familiar to me). But the most bizarre of an engaging, off-beat set of pieces is *I Am An American* — My Government Will Reward You, for electric harp, live electronics and tape. Inspired by the "blood chit," a piece of silk cloth carried by US fight crews and to be used to ask for help when shot down, it's an angry mix of Americana and exotic Orientalism.

Gerard McChrystal

Meeting Point: *Salva* (soprano sax) to McChrystal plays soprano sax concertos by Dave Heath, Michael Torke and Michael Nyman, and shorter alto pieces by Ian Wilson and Michael McGlynn. Heath's concerto is *The Celtic*, a playfully rapidly tedious affair. Nyman's concerto is based around a quote from "Where The Bee Sucks" from Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*. But the most interesting effort is by Michael Torke, younger generation minimalist. Recently also recorded by John Harle, it starts out with a kind of Oriental charm, though the second movement lullaby is thin. Pretty tunes though. But it's hard to enjoy the plummy, "correct" tone of "classical" sax players like McChrystal, and their long, string-style legato lines which are intended to blend with the rest of the section and orchestra. Maybe it's more bearable on soprano. But a lightweight commitment in any event.

Alfred Schnittke *Symphony No 4/Three Sacred Hymns* CHANDOS CHN 9443 CD The tightly-constructed Fourth Symphony for four singers and orchestra is based on different styles of religious chant,

Christian and Jewish. Written pre-perestroika in 1984, it laments the suppression, or loss, of faith for which religious-inspired minimalism — but not Schnittke's music — has become a comfortable substitute. Trademark upper-register strings mark emotional extremes, while harpsichord, piano and celeste express ritualistic elements. The effect is not as bleak as with Schnittke's more recent music. His often overwrought theatricality has been criticised, but the most successful works, of which this is one, demand attention. The performance by The Russian State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Polyansky is powerful and dramatic.

Iannis Xenakis *Pliésades* HARMONA MUNDI HMA 1905185 CD **Bang On A Can All-Stars** *Industry Sony Classical SMC 66683* CD Xenakis's contemporary classic for percussion. *Pliésades* has had at least four recordings since its premiere by the fabulous Percussions De Strasbourg in 1979. This is a reissue of their 1986 recording. Xenakis, ogre of the post-war avant-garde, simplified his style in the 70s, building non-Western scales without octaves and reducing rhythm to regular but polyrhythmic pulse. He also developed the *Suex*, a new metallic instrument with 19 pitches distributed unevenly in microtones, which is featured here. Though the gamelan-based episodes are gentler, the dominant effect is primitive, brutal and awesome (especially when heard live). An essential recording. If *Pliésades* shows that the "art music" tradition can have something to say about rhythm, the genre-crossing of *Bang On A Can All-Stars* dilutes the music they're trying to bridge. I had them down as a percussion ensemble, but that's more a matter of relentlessly pounding rhythmic style than instrumentation. The younger composers represented on *Industry* — Julia Wolfe, David Lang and Michael Gordon — say they're "too funky" for the academy and too structured for the club scene." More likely they're not funky enough for the club scene, and too unfunked for either.

Takashi Yoshimatsu

Symphony No 2/Guitar Concerto/Therendy To Tola CHANDOS CHN 9438 CD Born — presumably in Japan — in 1953, Yoshimatsu uses Western classical

forms to create music of a refined and delicate sensibility. An obvious comparison is with the much-lamented Toru Takemitsu, who also bridged Western and Eastern styles, though the younger composer is more Romantic. About *Therendy To Tola*, an endangered bird-species, he writes "The delicate penshens, and the callous sunbirds — that seems to be a natural law." But the *Therendy* is also "a hymn of praise for the revival of these beautiful creatures and

for the revival of tonality." The Second Symphony has three movements: requiems in Asian, Western and African styles. The result is surprisingly un-digital-like. The colourful *Guitar Concerto* — with soloist Gage Ogden — has surprising affinities with Rodg's well-known *Concerto De Aranjuez*. Sometimes it's almost too light and feathery, yet there's a substantial core to this beautiful, exquisitely-fashioned music, and an original voice. □

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Low End Theories *(continued from page 30)*

The German scene quickly turned dark and nihilistic. "People got into heroin and speed, there were parties in East Berlin with this very hard Industrial Acid sound, Underground Resistance and Plus B, 150 bpm."

Influenced by the abstract militancy of Underground Resistance, Empire formed the apt-Tekno group Atan Teenage Riot. Atan signed to a major label, but were dropped before they released an album. Wrecking a recording studio's amplifier and running up huge cab bills by stopping off at record stores, they were just too much trouble.

By this point — the end of '93 — Alec had already released around 15 EPs of solo material on Force Inc and other labels, including "Hunt Down The Nazis" and "Suicide." Meanwhile, he was experimenting with a Germanic Jungle sound for Rot Beats, drawing on the influence of UK "darkside" tracks by Buzzy B and Reinforced. Darkore remains an influence on Digital Hardcore, which is both a scene and a label (DHR). "Our beats are fast and distorted, but the programming is not as complex as the UK producers."

Breakbeat appeared as both an antidote to Germanic Techno's Aryan funklessness, and as a multicultural statement. "I did 'Hunt Down The Nazis' at a time when skinheads were attacking immigrants. Then you'd discover, talking about the attacks to people on the rave scene, that a lot of people were quite racist. At the Omen Club, Turkish kids were turned away for no reason. There was quite a nationalist aura to German Techno. 'Now we are back on the map.' Mark Spoon from Jam and Spoon made a comment on MTV, about how white people had Techno and black people had HipHop, and that's the way it should stay. One neo-Nazi magazine even hailed Techno as proper German music."

Ironically, Empire now thinks that UK Jungle has gotten too funky. "The energy is missing. Jungle is just not forceful enough, and a whole night of it is just too flat. The idea of mixing, of fading tracks into each other smoothly, is over-rated. Pirate radio was better before the DJs learned to mix properly. DJ technique is like a guitarist who knows how to make a really complicated guitar solo. A Stages riff can mean much more, with just three notes. If the energy's not there, what's the point?"

With its speedfreak tenacity and brutalist nose aesthetic, Digital Hardcore has less in common with Jungle than it does with that other descendant of original 1991 pan-European hardcore: the terror-Gabba and speedcore sounds of labels like PCP, Kotzack, Fischkopf, Cross Fade Entertainment, Pires and Gangstar Toons. Industry limo of whom can be found on the Empire-compiled *Capital Noise* Chapter 1 CD. DHR's own acts, such as ECBDR, Moonraker, Killout Trash and Sonic Suburbies, mesh up 200 bpm breaks, ultra-Gabba riffs, thrash-Metal guitar, Riot Grrr shouting, and lots of midfrequency noise. "In Techno, in Jungle, the middle frequencies are taken out, it's all bass and treble," says Alec. "But the middle frequencies are the rock guitar frequencies, it's where the aggression comes from."

As well as "boost the midrange, cut the bass," Digital Hardcore's other key precepts are "tempo changes keep it exciting" and "faceless Techno DJs are boring." At their parties, DJs favour a crush-collision mess-throw of mixed up styles and bpm's, and there are always groups playing live. Instead of hypnotising the listener into a headnodding stupor, Digital Hardcore is meant to be a wake-up call.

So if rave is Heavy Metal (rowdy, stuperfing) and Electronica is Progressive rock (pseudo-spiritual, contemplative), does that mean Digital Hardcore (aggressive, speedy, noisy) is punk rock? "The only similarity with punk is the frustration," says Alec. "And that's also where our stuff differs from Miles Plateaux: it's less theoretical, and perhaps more negative. All the kids are into chaos and anarchy, because nothing else seems to work."

"There's this foundation of musicians who used to play at parties and have now been put out of business by DJs. German Rock Musicians Against Techno, and we want to join it." He pauses, then adds, "Just to take the piss." Except it means it, man. In Memoriam Gilles Deleuze, Alec Empire's Hypermodern Jazz 2000 S. Electric Ladyland II and the Force inc compilations *Rauschen 10* and *Rauschen 11* are out now through Sader. *Hunter* The Rest, a compilation, and *ECBDR's* self-titled debut CD are out on Digital Hardcore Records (through Veto). *Capital Noise* Chapter 1: Noise And Politics is being done by Division (Fax: 00 49 30 791 7916). Folds And Rhinemas, another Deleuze tribute CD featuring Mouse On Mars, Oval, Scanner, Man and David Shea, is out now on Sub Rosa (through Sader).

Courtney Pine *(continued from page 40)*

A lot of people can't go there, they don't want to see that truth, it's frightening sometimes. You keep going until you get there and it takes half an hour then we'll get there. When I was playing with John, that's what I wanted to do. Obviously I wasn't technically mature enough or experienced enough to play that kind of sound. The funny thing is it's that I feel I can do that now, but the requirement of my gig is not that, not at this moment.

Some of the tracks on *Modern Day Jazz* Stories move towards this territory.

Rip the saxophone in two, yeah. While I'm playing I think, "Oh man, how long are we going on for, just one more go." But then it's, No, no, we've got to pull it back because of arplay. I sat back and listened to [the album] and felt I had some light and shade. Because that's what I think my gig is, I've got to reflect all these different lights and shades we have over here. But yeah, I like that kind of hardcore way of playing the saxophone and I will do some more.

I had a friend who played guitar and I used to do tapes around his house. I used to tape [Albert] Ayler's "Holy Ghost" and those kind of songs. He was into Soyogrya and he just couldn't understand what I was doing. I was taping this ten minute bass solo with this squeaky, squeaky stuff. He said, "What's the point?" I said, "Wait and see. This is the real deal. Soyogrya?" You're not going to put Soyogrya on now are you?"

TRICKY

"Moody Broody Buddhist Camp" from "Pumpkin" EP (Fourth & Broadway)

It reminds me of Tricky

It is.

But I don't know the song. I know everything Tricky's done.

It's "Moody Broody Buddhist Camp" from the "Pumpkin" EP.

Yeah, OK. [Laughs] This guy is out. I think it was the combination of the chemistry, the components that he put together, and the way he's put it together that really got it for me. And also he does that drawl thing. Then the real drum kit and that acoustic guitar. This is almost like Björk territory. PJ Harvey territory, the lines between PJ Harvey on island now, isn't she? [Pine used to be signed to Island.] You see all

this stuff's happening when I'm not on the label. When I was on there who did I have to deal with? Mica Paris! [Laughs] As soon as I leave they get Tricky.

My album is totally influenced by his stuff. He's somebody I'd definitely like to see in the studio, in terms of how the stuff comes out. I don't know how he gets the results, a genuine programmer, if he's a DJ or whatever. But he gets good results. [Mica Paris] really had a good flavour to it, very unique. He came from this group called The Wild Bunch, a Bristol band. I don't know if he actually came from it, but he's affiliated to Massive Attack [who did].

Like you say, his roots are in mid-Bristol. British street soul: Massive, Soul II Soul.

Listening to that stuff at the time, it would have been hard to predict that it would develop into something like this. It's just the way the whole thing has diffused, lots of separate elements. I could draw a line between Julian Cope, PJ Harvey, maybe Björk, maybe you could connect that with Goldie, back down to Tricky to Massive Attack, Tricky Thom. You can draw all these connections. I've worked with Soul II Soul — everything is connected in one way or another — but to predict what's going to come out next is very hard. Musicians the way we work, you've got four things on in the house at the same time. You'll be walking up the stairs and hear something on the TV, and something being played upstairs, and suddenly they'll hit together and you'll think, "Yeah, you can mix that acoustic guitar sound with that kind of drum sound and that kind of voice." Who's to know who's to come next year or in five years time?

The musicians who come through, the ones who I check for, are the ones who are successful not in terms of chart success but the ones who can reflect the climate best — that actually know. They've gone to ten different clubs, they can see what people are about to listen to, what tones are going on, what the latest equipment is, what people are going to talk about and they capture that sound and then put it out. And the record company has to be good enough to put it out straight away, and then it's seen as being ahead of its time, like this. This is a mixture of so much stuff. It's like putting it all in a glass and seeing what comes out — as long as the glass can hold it, and he [Tricky] can. That's why he's all right, he's had too Tricky. ☐

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Beethoven JH

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Blackwell History Of Music In Britain Volume 6: The Twentieth Century Edited by Stephen Banfield

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Stephen Banfield's volume is an invaluable reference guide to music in Britain this century, with articles on popular and art music in most of their aspects, the marketplace for music, and criticism. Article titles are carefully chosen — "The Jazz Age" is mostly not about jazz, but popular music up until 1955. "The Rock Revolution" is only mostly about rock, from 1955. Last year saw the academy, in the person of Charles Hamm, confronting pop (*Putting Popular Music In Its Place*, reviewed in *The Wire* 138), and here Richard Middleton sets himself the same tricky task. His two articles, "The Problem Of Popular Music" and "The Problem Of Revolution", are impressive, even if the critical approach can be unclear. Inserting on the objectivity of critical criteria, he then claims that "the musical categories [of popular and art music] are discursively constructed, products of ideology." This suggests that a writer on music can't actually say anything at all without having it ideologically deconstructed. But Middleton is more robust (or incontinent). Later he writes that singers in early British rock 'n' roll — Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Billy Fury — "were mediocre, imitative, lacking charisma and unrelated in the idiom", and he praises Steel Pulse's *Horseshoer Revolution* as "serious, emotionally intense music." This contrasts with Hamm's 'value-free' approach. But does he believe pop needs the "legitimation" of musical transcription — The Stones and Kylie Minogue get the treatment here — and

the whole academic apparatus? No clear answer is forthcoming.

This debate ought to be familiar territory. Less familiar ground is covered in Cyril Ehrlich's essay "The Marketplace." You might think someone called Cyril wouldn't have a lot to say about chart pop and rock, but the (bourgeois) social context to art music which he does cover is a neglected one. There's fascinating material on the "vicious circle of profusion and mediocrity" that characterised professional music in Britain, and on the paramount ideological influence of the BBC. David Kershaw's entertaining article "Film And Television Music" starts with publishers' suggestions for silent film mood-music. Beethoven's *Coriolanus* was recommended as "suitable for tree-felling or lumber-rolling." It goes on to discuss material as diverse as Elizabeth Lutyens's serialist score for *Paranoiac* (1963) and Johnny Johnston's music for the *Fairy Liquid* commercial (1958, still heard in the 1980s).

Over half the volume is devoted to art music. The 'encyclopedic' treatment can be in some, and the division into instrumental, dramatic and vocal music is cumbersome. But this is one of the most comprehensive available treatments of British art music from Vaughan Williams to Britten. New Complexity and postmodernism. The chapter on later instrumental music by Jim Samson is the most impressive. He has important things to say about the 'polarity' of 'New Complexity' (Ferreynough, Finnis, Dillon) and postmodernism, and concludes that, "paradoxically, the notion of an avant garde has become itself a conservative — even an anachronistic — idea, an idea predicated on the assumption of a single culture." Interestingly though, the postmodern

'critique of modernism' fails to recognise that the successors of Boulez and Stockhausen have "few remaining points of contact with any concept of an avant garde, and need not be assessed in those terms".

Samson does make some connections with popular music, something which until fairly recently simply did not exist on the ground. One obvious and important theme is suggested but not developed: the 'Britishness' of British music, from Vaughan Williams and the pastoralists to Maxwell Davies, and from The Beatles to Britpop? This is a weighty volume (over 500 pages) clearly designed for the reference library, and at £90 there won't be too many personal buyers. Despite my criticisms it's an essential resource — make sure your library gets a copy.

ANDY HAMILTON

No Sound Is Innocent

By Edwin Prevost

COPYLIP PRESS (Pbk £15)

Edwin Prevost (better known as Eddie) has done as much as anyone to put improvisation back at the heart of music making. As the drummer and percussionist since the mid-60s of the legendary group AMM, not to mention his jazz-based groups of the 70s and 80s, or as an organiser (one of the key people behind the recent resurgence of the London Musicians' Collective), he has always been at the centre of things.

Yet, as he would be the first to insist, improvised music is nothing if not a collective phenomenon — a network that has gone on making new connections for more than three decades. What does mark Prevost out is that, like Derek Bailey, he has staked out his position not just through his music but through writing, raising his voice



Peter Maxwell Davies



constantly against the hostility — or, worse, the smug silences — of successive musical establishments.

Unlike Bailey whose *Improvisation — Its Nature And Practice in Music* is perhaps the essential companion to this book, his thoughts have until now been scattered in obscure places. So it is to be welcomed that some are collected here, along with the nine "meta-musical narratives" ("improvisatory" meditations on the key issues in Prevost's and APM's aesthetic) that form the core of the book.

Someone once called all ways of world-making "the phrase could have been made for Prevost. He is unashamedly transcendentalist. "In art we make the world," he writes. The important questions of how you find your individuality are never purely technical (avoiding doing this or that), they are always personal and social. When musicians play the question he wants them to ask is "What kind of world would be sympathetic to the music we feel must be made?"

He manages to bring off an original combination: an ascetic personal philosophy of "perpetual self-questioning" and self-discipline, and a biting sense of the sordid way the music industry works (he is scathing about the self-serving blindness of the classical music establishment and the feathered luxury of the PRS multi-millionaires).

The reason the combination works is because his anger at the way creativity is stifled in our society (by "technocracy," by directionless "economics") is fed straight back into his determination to hold onto a vision of a different way of doing things. He rarely wastes time on polemics for its own sake.

There is, he insists, no bias for sermons, there are no "rules." And this, perhaps, is the point that underlies his use of the slightly mysterious term "meta-music." Meta-music is a way of making music that "reveals a new way of looking at the world" — not through some overblown "grand vision" (one of Prevost's biggest bugbears is Wagner), but through standing apart from received musical notions of what comes easily ("I am not that") by refusing "to own or to be owned."

I know no one else addressing these questions so unflinchingly (if they're out there, I'd like to read them). This more than makes up for two faults that run through the book. One is minor: an occasional lapse into portentousness (but most of the time, the style is clear and hits its targets). The other is more serious: sometimes there is a jarring intolerance of other musics (especially rock) that perhaps operate by different rules from those Prevost has set for himself, but deserve at least the chance to speak for themselves. If there is one way of "resetting," there are surely others too. Anyway, Prevost sounds no more convincing than Adorno did in condemning regular rhythm or harmony as automatic sell-outs to capitalism. Here he judges music-making from the outside, a mistake he never makes elsewhere.

It's a small fault, however, to set beside the book's virtues. This is an inspiring, modest and (to use a word that Prevost is not ashamed to use) beautiful book. Nothing in it is more beautiful than his own cry of resistance: "I am something other than what you tell me I am."

NICK COULDRY

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